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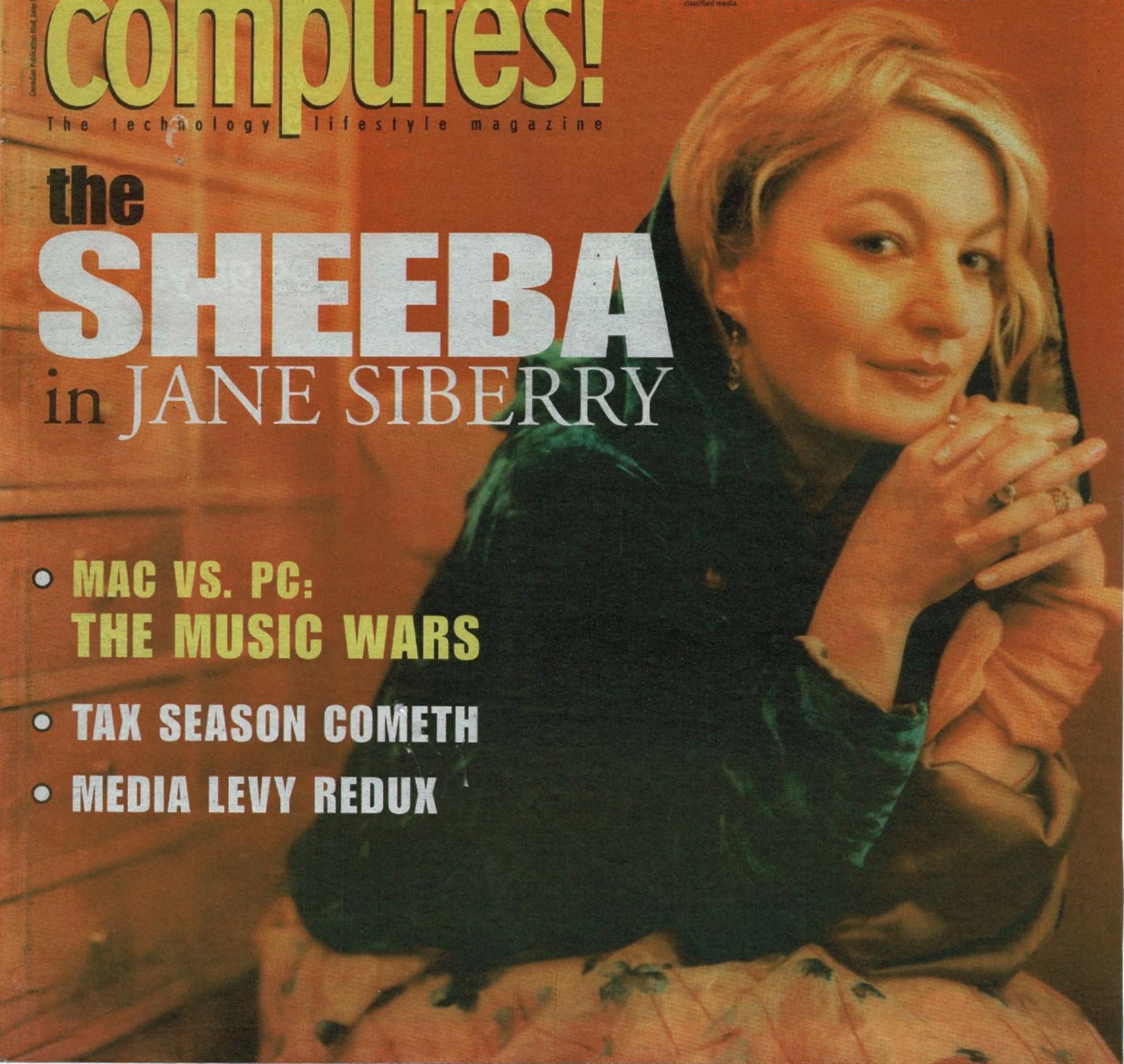
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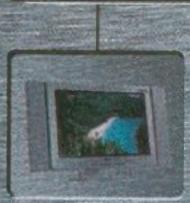
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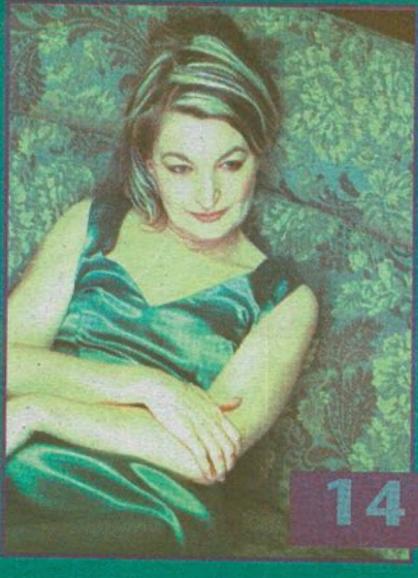


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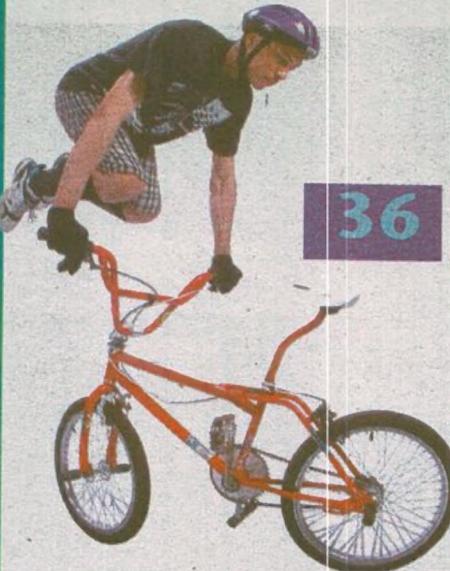
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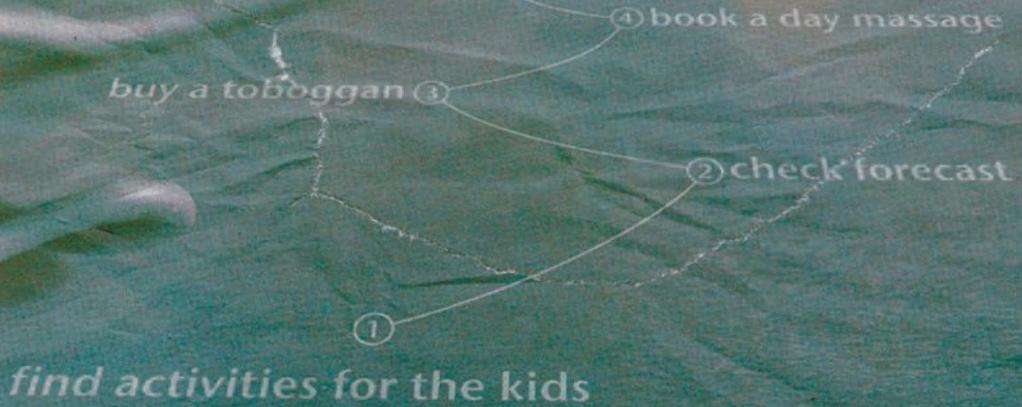
CoolTunes comes again. Turn to page 18 to learn more.

See page 55 for details on a new Photo Spree Assignment.

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As journalists that cover the technology beat we here at *Toronto Computes!* are exposed to a plethora of products and services that exist in this industry. Nearly everyday we are bombarded with e-mailed announcements, usually overwritten, that proclaim a new breakthrough for some technology that will not only revolutionize the way we do things but is easy to use to boot. Some of these products or services are actually worthwhile and we

report on them in these pages.

It is a very privileged position to be in. Basically we usually get to play with the toys, be they printers, cameras, software, games or whatever, before most other people have a chance to buy them. One of our mandates is to review products so that our readers can make informed decisions before purchase.

Unfortunately not all the products we get in ever come close to matching the hype that is on the press release. Some of the products are quite bad – instead of helping you they create more problems in terms of usage or conflict with other programs or devices. Others force you to improvise so many tweaks and jump through so many hoops that you usually forget what the purpose of the device was once it is up and running. Some just simply do not work. We tend not to write about the bad products, saving precious editorial space for products and services that are worth having rather

than writing cleverly about products that we should avoid. Trashing a product is usually much easier to do than to write an intelligent story outlining the pros and cons of the product and who should buy it and for what reason.

We sometimes do get a bit cynical about some of the products that come in, knowing that these products have no chance of success in the marketplace. But this cynicism is quickly washed away when great products do come in.

Although many pundits are touting that the bursting of the high-tech bubble has had a negative impact on technological development, from where I sit, I can not agree. There have been great accomplishments made in the last two years in certain sectors of the technological market – especially when it comes to technologies for the average consumer.

The advances in digital photography have been outstanding. Not only have the prices for cameras fallen to a point where they are affordable for most, they can now compete in terms of quality and price point, especially in the point and shoot segment, with traditional film cameras. Software to manipulate and enhance digital photographs has become easier to use, more powerful and more affordable as well. Printing technology has really taken off. A few years ago it was nearly impossible to get a half decent colour print out of an image on a home printer – now it is hard to print a bad one.

The advances in digital video and digital music at home are causing a revolution in those industries. The power of the software that one can buy for the home is truly mind-boggling.

When we get products like these in that is when we forget about all that meaningless hype and really enjoy our work.

Nestor Gula can be reached by e-mailing nestor@tcp.ca ♦

Reader Feedback

Re: Frivolous, fun and just better (TC! Feb 2003)

Exciting times, but ya know, in the last eight years of ownership, neither my home stereo nor my TV have required a "service pack" or a "security rollup patch." One of the things that Microsoft, and the rest of the computer industry for that matter, have done to the consumer is repeatedly released products that are not fully tested. To think that one day all of our home entertainment equipment could be controlled, and potentially be failed, by a single operating system of any sort is scary.

When I purchase a piece of home

entertainment equipment, I expect it to do 100 per cent of the things it says it can on the box. If not, I bring it back to the store as flawed and exchange it or get my money back.

I don't wait for software upgrades from the manufacturer because my TV is incompatible with my brand of VCR.

Mike Towler

Re: Linfield's Line: I do not agree ...
(TC! Jan 2003) I read one of your recent articles about licence agreements. This is an area I have spent a lot of time researching and also an area that I'm responsible for.

I recall when our company started considering a project to deploy Windows XP. At the time, the licence agreement was written in such a way that Microsoft would only permit the use of NetMeeting technologies to remotely control the system. This prohibited the use of VNC, PC Anywhere or any similar product. The agreement has since been revised.

I suspect you've heard of the above. This has very interesting implications to you directly.

Also, thanks again for the advice a few months ago about publishing security articles.

Brian Erdelyi

Letter of the Month

For his letter this month, Mike Towler wins a copy of *Star Trek: Starfleet Command 3*. *Starfleet Command 3* is a real-time strategy game that adds some RPG elements to the mix. Gamers can customize each individual ship's speed, shield, combat system, weapons and many other variants. A simplified combat interface makes the game more accessible to non-RTS gamers.



The Editor *Toronto Computes!*
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Letters on issues raised in the paper or general computer topics are welcome. Please be brief. We regret that we are unable to look up stories from past issues, suggest products, or solve all your computer problems. All correspondence must include your full name in addition to your e-mail or snail-mail address. Letters may be edited for space or content.

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Dell PCs to go floppy free?

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Dell, the company that trades back and forth as the number one and two computer systems company with IBM and Compaq (now under the HP umbrella) is saying goodbye to floppy drives.

The absence of the familiar 3.5", 1.44MB floppy disk drive will only affect the company's higher-end desktop machines like its 8250 models.



Depending on customer response, the ubiquitous floppy drive could become much less so, as it is phased out or offered only as an option, as opposed to being standard equipment on all of Dell's machines.

Dell says the change has come about as a result of other storage options, just as simple as standard 1.44 floppies but with larger storage capacities, like USB flash storage keys.

The flash storage media starts out on the low end at 16MB, and are currently

offered in storage sizes up to 1GB in the same keychain-size form factor.

At the time of writing, Dell is only offering a branded USB Key with a storage capacity of 16MB for about US\$20, about the price of a floppy drive for a notebook computer. The 16MB Key replaces an 8MB version that sold for about US\$30 when Dell announced that it would be trying to strip its notebook computers of floppy drives back in October, 2002.

By way of perspective, Mac users have been living happily sans floppy drive on their platform of choice for a few years.

Experimental broadcast of experimental music

Arraymusic launched its newly designed Web site in Toronto in mid-February with the promise of streaming concert events and an entirely new educational and fun browsing experience for fans of "art music" and newcomers to the aural arts.

The current Arraymusic (www.arraymusic.com) ensemble is made up of nine accomplished solo musicians, a few of whom are also composers, and the Web site launch comes

with the promise of expanding the reach of the ensemble as well as other art music endeavours.

Toronto based design company Vengeance9 (www.vengence9.com) built the site, which makes heavy use of flash. The site offers streaming audio of many of the ensemble's pieces as documentary-style interviews with members of Arraymusic talking about different musical techniques, methods, theory and experiences. Over 1GB of content in all says Richard Sacks, a percussionist in the ensemble and MC at the Arraymusic.com launch.

With all the pratfalls of being an art nouveau group



(most notably, the lack of exposure and resulting lack of compensation for all the hard work), Arraymusic is — with the technical support of Umbrella Music and Mediaco and financial support of the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation, the Canadian Council for the Arts, the SOCAN Foundation and others — bringing the same spirit of experimentation that goes into its music to the delivery of it. On Feb. 22, at 8:00, the group is putting on a concert at the Glen Gould Studio on Front St. in Toronto. The concert will be simultaneously Web cast to five satellite locations in Newfoundland, Ontario, B.C. and south of the border in Pennsylvania and Long Island.

Arraymusic says this Web cast is meant as an experiment in delivery.

While Web casting traditionally means individual users watching low-resolution video on their own computer monitors, the satellite locations will be broadcasting the concert on a big screen in a social wine and cheese event.

While the concert will have come and gone by the time this issue of *Toronto Computes!* hits the streets, the video will be available on arraymusic.com for more traditional, one person viewing. ♦



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SINCE 1995



By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

While CD-R discs are the most popular and perhaps easiest distribution method for musicians, especially independent musicians, the shiny silver discs lack much of the charm (not to mention ambient noise) of a vinyl record.

To that end, Vestax (www.vestax.com), a name well known with DJs and fans of electronic music, is releasing a vinyl recorder that will cut a record from a vinyl blank. The VRX-2000 acts as a standalone recorder and records an analogue signal rather than a data signal as with CD-Rs. This means that to record 45 minutes of music will take



the full 45 minutes.

Vestax says the VRX-2000 will eliminate much of the cost of cutting a vinyl record for independent musicians. The company's Web site states (very) optimistically that "the VRX-2000 may also be the catalyst in seeing vinyl re-emerging as a preferred medium for many recording artists."

The company unveiled the vinyl cutter at the National Association of Music Marketing (NAMM) show and says it will be available in March.

Vestax could have a hit on its hands with its VRX-2000. However, at \$8000 a pop and with vinyl blanks going for about the price of a 12" import single, it could turn out to be a rather large albatross around the company's neck. Either way, it's a neat technology.

Shuttle wheel for the space conscious

Contour A/V Solutions (www.contourav.com) has already made waves with its ShuttlePRO PC video editing shuttle wheel that blurs the line between the tactile feel of analogue

video editing and the power of PC video editing.

Its acclaimed ShuttlePRO now has a smaller, younger cousin.

The company's latest addition, the SpaceShuttle, aims to bring the benefits of the \$US99 ShuttlePRO to the everyman as a scaled down version of the PC editing shuttle wheel with a street price of US\$50.

The peripheral looks very much like the one-button mouse that shipped with the first generation of iMacs with the significant difference of being larger and having a 14-point shuttle ring with a jog wheel for frame by frame advancing.

The SpaceShuttle — presumably named after its older, larger cousin with "space" thrown in so we understand that it has a much smaller footprint than the ShuttlePRO — also has five programmable buttons on the top of the unit which can accept any keyboard or mouse commands to make video or music editing on the PC easier.

Cakewalk debuts Project5

Cakewalk, already well known in music circles, announced its new music software studio, *Project5*, at the NAMM



show in California.

Project5 is a software synthesizer program with samplers, sequencers and MIDI effects bundled in what the company is calling an integrated studio environment.

In addition to the usual PC music software capabilities, *Project5* includes a virtual analogue synthesizer, digital sampler, analogue modular drum synthesizer and a live-performance audio engine, which will allow users to make changes on the fly without sacrificing playback. The company says this makes *Project5* perfect for live performances.

The software carries a suggested retail price of \$US429, making it less for the PC music hobbyist and more for the enthusiast or electronic performance musician.

Cakewalk says *Project5* will use ACID — another popular loop-based music editing software — compatible looping that will integrate tempo and pitch matching between the two programs. ♦



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"Do you love music enough to do it

without making any money?"

—Jane Siberry

The Sheeba in Jane Siberry

By NESTOR GULA

The concept is rather nauseating: A successful artist has to have a good head for business. Surrounding oneself with good business folk is also a sign of good judgment. Whichever way you look at it, the moniker holds true. While for some artists it may have been easy to get that elusive first taste of artistic fame, sustaining that level requires both artistic brilliance and shrewd business savvy. This is true in most artistic endeavours, but nowhere is it highlighted as much as in the music industry, where flavours-of-the-week are a very popular phenomenon. It's not uncommon for music industry contracts to require that artists relinquish ownership of their creative works.

While the last few years have seen the recording industry consolidate into a few extremely large players with other interests besides music, there has also been a small movement for artists to take control of their own destinies, recording, releasing and marketing their own material. This is where the balance between artistry and business really takes hold.

Jane Siberry appeared on the music scene in Canada with a fairly successful self-titled debut album in

1981. Her big break came with her second album, *No Borders Here*, that contained her first hit song, "Mimi on the Beach." This and her next album, *The Speckless Sky*, were released by A&M/Windham Hill. Her next four albums carried the Reprise/Warner label. Jane Siberry was a major label recording musician. But as her contract with Warner expired in 1996, she reassessed her situation and turned down all the offers she was getting from various other record companies.

There were many reasons for her forgoing a recording contract from a major record label. As a solo artist, she felt that the company was too large for her. Although Siberry scored a few hit singles and albums — her 1993 release *When I Was A Boy* sold over 100,000 copies — she never had that big million-selling recording that the companies were after. Continuously having "critical but non-commercial success," Siberry felt that she was a bit of a charity case and wanted to strike out on her own.

In 1996, the Internet was just coming into its own. Siberry seized upon this new technology and used it as the nucleus of her business. She transformed her small fan club, which was being maintained by her mother, into www.sheeba.ca. Sheeba is the name of her record company, her Web site and the focal point of everything that is Jane Siberry.

Initially, Siberry hired staff to manage her fledgling business. A few rookie mistakes forced her to reevaluate her business. "I cleared the decks in 1998," she says. She became a true solo company, doing everything by herself. She did her own Web design and maintenance, took Internet orders, stuffed envelopes and everything else that was needed to make the business survive. She admits that there were times where she wanted to shut everything down. She still says that the experience has "been so much a struggle that it's really been a straightjacket." Sheer strength of will and a strange sense of responsibility — "someone has to receive the bills and pay them, and as soon as you have that window open then why not keep selling records too" — kept the site alive.

Running her own record label has been quite an interesting experience for Siberry. "As far as running a label goes. Is it a viable thing? I still don't know," she muses. "Two years into the business I thought I knew. But six years later, I know my [financial] books inside out but what I know now is hugely different than what I thought I knew at first." Like most small businesses, capitalization is difficult. "I've been reluctant to get grants," she says. "For a while I did not think I should because I had so many more advantages than other artists. I've done a lot with no capital." She frequently used her credit cards, and their high interest, as a bank. Besides records



and limited merchandise sales on the Sheeba site, Siberry has a patron program that allows fans to directly buy studio time for her recording projects. "When I was doing *Hush*, there was a patron in New York who sent a big cheque anonymously that got that recording started," she says. Her biggest market, incidentally, is in New York.

Lessons learned

"I learned a lot of lessons when I screwed up," Siberry says, laughing. One lesson she learned is that being well organized is crucially important. "I've realized how disorganized companies are — big and small," she says. "My company is a lot more organized than others I deal with." Since she ran Sheeba herself for a long time, outside contractors now can't pull the

continued on page 23



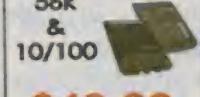
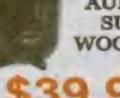
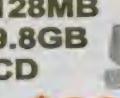
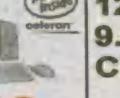
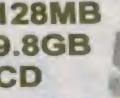
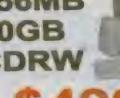
"I believe someone can exist as a creative force without needing huge sales and competing in that whole world."

—Jane Siberry

Discography

2002	Love is Everything: The Jane Siberry Anthology
2001	City
2000	Calling All Angels
2000	Hush
1999	New York Trilogy (Boxed set of Tree, Lips, and Child)
1999	Tree
1999	Lips
1997	Child
1997	A Day in the Life NYC 1997
1996	Teenager
1995	Maria
1994	A Collection 1984-1989 (Compilation)
1993	When I Was A Boy
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1987	The Walking
1984	The Speckless Sky
1985	No Borders Here
1981	Jane Siberry

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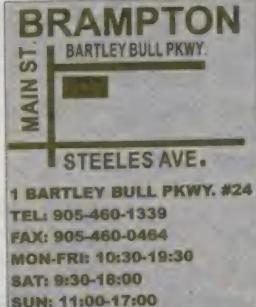
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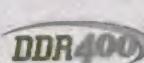


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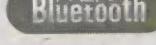
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2. This contest is open to amateur unsigned acts. All genres of music will be considered. Employees and families of *Toronto Computes!*, its parent company, subsidiaries and affiliates are not eligible. Contestants must be Canadian citizens or have landed immigrant status.
3. Winners will be chosen by a select panel of judges and will be judged based on melody, composition and lyrics (when applicable). The quality of performance and production will also be considered.
4. The first place winner will have first choice from the prize pool. The second place winner will have the second choice. The third place winner will have the remaining prize.
5. By submitting compositions and the signed entry form to this contest the entrant claims that their composition is original work and he/she holds all rights to the composition. The contestant also agrees to give *Toronto Computes!*, its parent companies and subsidiaries the non-exclusive right to use the compositions for future advertising and publicity purposes without additional compensation for a period of two (2) years from the date of the contest's closing date.
6. All entries must be postmarked by 5 PM EST June 30, 2003. Winners will be chosen by July 15, 2003. Winners will be contacted for their choice of prize. Results will be announced in the August issue of *Toronto Computes!*
7. All decisions of the judges are final.

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Digital music: Mac vs. PC



Okay here it is — the be all and end all to the battle between Mac and Windows. I will identify which one is finally the winner in the OS wars of the past 20 years. A victor will be unveiled. The true king will be crowned ...

By DWAYNE R. BROWN

And that winner is, as usual, the consumer.

Call it human nature, but we seem to be most happy when Company A is winning and Company B is losing. In this case it's Apple and Microsoft. From a purely numbers point, yeah, Apple lost a long time ago. How can you possibly argue when Microsoft Windows is installed in over 90 per cent of the world's computers? But those Mac types are a tough bunch. They refuse to play catch-up, they refuse to put out a really bad product and they absolutely refuse to die.

Not so long ago, there was a very clear line in the sand. If you were a professional creative type, you worked on a Mac; they were notoriously powerful and stable, the creative software built for them was simple to operate and rock solid in performance. Let's contrast that with a Windows machine; there never seemed to be enough power, software installations were hit and miss and more time was spent tweaking the system for that magic balance of performance and stability. Has that changed? Well yes ... and no.

Apple quietly flexed its digital audio muscle with the release of OS X. The company re-invented the wheel — audio in every Mac running OS X would now be handled directly by the operating system. They call it Core Audio. How simple is that? Take away the need for third party drivers and you find a system that runs more efficiently — so much so that it has broken a very important barrier.

What matters is the music. Make sure the system you choose will be your intuitive tool.

Latency, the time it takes for a sound to be processed by the digital realm (eg; keyboard, I/O gear, computer), has plagued digital musicians for years. Before Core Audio, latency in most computers was between 10 and 40 milliseconds (ms). Milliseconds may not sound like a lot, but 10 ms latency is considered very frustrating. If you were to hit the key on a keyboard you would hear a

pause before you heard the sound come out of the speakers. Imagine trying to compose music under those conditions. Core Audio has brought that number down to 3 ms; unless you are a professional dealing with fractions of a second daily, you will not notice latency that low. Welcome to the new world of digital audio. This development, along with the history of professional software for Mac, has helped Apple hold its dominance in the professional music arena.

Playing PC catch-up

Now, I said that Apple "re-invented" the wheel because, believe it or not, Microsoft was actually there first. The original MS-DOS system allowed applications to access the hardware directly. This was mostly in the form of gaming. When Windows 3.1 was released, in typical MS fashion, it forced applications to go through the OS and therefore slowed them down. Counterproductive? You bet it was. Many software makers got very frustrated that their apps ran so slow. Some didn't even bother to build new software that ran on 3.1.

Enter Charlie Steinberg. Steinberg was a musician in the early '80s who thought there had to be a cheaper way to record

music. He and his music partners developed one of the first music composing/recording programs still available today — *Cubase*. In the process, Steinberg also came out with a little driver known as ASIO (Audio Streaming Input Output). This driver circumvented the Windows operating system and once again allowed audio software to talk directly to the hardware. Latency with an ASIO driver is under 7 ms. Microsoft has made an attempt at copying the Apple model with DirectX 8. It allows applications to access the hardware directly, but ASIO (a third party driver) still outperforms it. DirectX 9 has recently been released, but the numbers are not in yet. Considering that DirectX has seen latency of up to 40 ms, the company clearly has a bit of work ahead of it.

Does it sound like Mac, with Core Audio, and PC, with ASIO, are on common ground? Guess what — they are. Is one truly better than the other? Why not ask an easy question — like why does man exist?

Breaking down the differences

The world of professional music is still continued on page 22

Media levy reviewed amid storm of objections

By FRANK LENK

On January 21, the Copyright Board of Canada started hearings to determine whether the levy on blank recording media would rise by as much as 161 per cent. An expectant hush fell upon the industry, as previously vocal objectors were advised by legal counsel to refrain from further comment until the matter was settled, one way or the other.

For example, the Retail Council of Canada (RCC), which has been an outspoken opponent of the new levies, would not make any further statement when contacted in January. And the Canadian Coalition for Fair Digital Access (CCFDA), formed specifically to combat the levy, went equally silent.

Nonetheless, opposition continues to seethe against what Saul Rothbart, president and executive director of the Internet Council of Canada, has called an "insane tax."

Disc manufacturing

To consumers, the media levy is an inconvenience, but for bulk users of blank media, it's a calamity. Canadian disc duplicators, for example, are particularly disadvantaged by the levy. "It will definitely have a big impact," says Neil Quigley, sales manager of Disc

Manufacturing Technologies, a major Toronto duplicator.

For one thing, the levy gives Canadian companies an incentive to have discs duplicated in the US, which would then allow them to be imported free of the levy. "Larger firms will just buy out of the US," Quigley predicts. "The US [duplicators] are licking their chops, in that they'll see a lot more business."

But the biggest issue Quigley raises is one that's so far been largely ignored: Enforcement.

So far, it seems virtually nonexistent. "It's all an honour system," says Quigley, noting that the Canadian Private Copying Collective (CPCC), the body

"You can't buy discs anywhere on the planet for less than 18 cents US," explains Quigley. That's about 30 cents Canadian. Add the levy, and the cost goes up to 50 cents, still with no profit for the vendor. Meanwhile, an importer not paying the levy can retail discs as low as 40 cents each.

By the way, since the levy is inevitably buried in the retail price of blank media, you're paying GST and PST on it. So the government is getting a cut of the proceeds.

CD-R discs clear customs as "recordable media," so eventually the paperwork could be followed up — but customs officers are not charged with this

It's also been widely noted that the massive new storage-media levies requested by the CPCC ... would make many products non-viable in Canada.

charged with collecting and disbursing the levy, has yet to prosecute anyone for non-payment. Larger distributors are obviously collecting the levy, but many smaller importers are not.

"It creates an uneven playing field," complains Quigley. "There's guys who can get rich just by not charging the levy."

task, nor with actually collecting the levy. That's up to the CPCC, which would presumably have to hire its own battalions of border collectors, if it intended to police any but the most prominent importers.

All this wouldn't come cheap, leaving one to wonder just how much of the levy could possibly be left over for the supposed beneficiaries, should collection ever be properly enforced.

Hiroshi Kobayashi, product manager for computer media with Maxell Canada, is similarly concerned about enforcement. "Part of our stance is we're waiting for the CPCC to go after people who aren't paying the levy."

Maxell has had customers report CD-Rs available at prices that make it obvious the seller is not paying the levy. "You can tell right away," says Kobayashi, based on the pricing.

Kobayashi points out that this has the further detrimental effect of driving users to lower-quality product, which is more likely to be brought in without levy. "We offer a premium product," notes Kobayashi. "Quality does matter."

Musicians and players

Other problems with the levy have been widely publicized, but continue to raise hackles.

For example, Saul Rothbart draws attention to the unfairness of the formula proposed by the CPCC for distribution of levy funds. "The formula is disadvantageous to Canadian musicians," he says.

He's particularly concerned that the CPCC is planning to factor in both album sales and radio play, thereby strongly favouring American artists. "Most of the money will go out of this country," he predicts.

Rothbart sees some form of copy protection as a legitimate alternative to the levy. "There's a clear business decision being made to allow the public to copy their CDs," he suggests.

It's also been widely noted that the massive new storage-media levies requested by the CPCC, and currently being considered by the Copyright Board, would make many products non-viable in Canada. Mark Jamieson,

Canadian director for Creative Labs, does the math: A 20 GB Creative Nomad Jukebox 3 music player would incur a levy of \$421 — notably greater than its current shelf price of \$399.

"I don't think we can take any product and double the retail price," observes Jamieson, sardonically. In fact, Creative has previously stated that if the increase passes, some products would likely be dropped from Canadian distribution.

The rise in grey market sales is another

Rolling your own

With all the controversy over "private copying," many music fans may be confused over just what is legal and what is not. Here's the short version, straight from the Canadian Private Copying Collective (CPCC), the body charged with collecting the levies on blank media.

Basically, "private copying" was made legal under the Canadian Copyright Act, by the same ruling that created the media levy (and hence the CPCC). The music industry's contention is that any distribution of music requires a royalty, and that the levy constitutes the legitimate royalty payable for private copying.

Having paid the levy (presumably), we now have the legal right to make unlimited private copies. Bear in mind, however, that "private copying" is subject to a very strict legal definition.

Compilation discs, cassette copies for the boom box or MP3 rips for use in your portable player are all private copies. However, "a copy made for someone else or for any purpose other than the copier's own use is not a private copy."

So forget about making copies for your friend Bob or your auntie Cecilia. That's verboten. As for posting music on the Internet or selling it ... well, these are just too horrifying to contemplate and very definitely outside the definition of "private copying."

It's also worth noting that, while we've purchased the right to copy music by paying the stiff levy on blank media, we certainly haven't purchased a guarantee that we'll actually be able to copy anything. If the music industry is successful in its quest for a secure music format (copy-protected CD, or perhaps DVD-audio), we could find that we've purchased nothing at all.

"The Copyright Act as we have it in Canada isn't addressing much as far as living in a digital age."

—Saul Rothbart

er problem. "We think the average consumer is smart enough to find a grey market source," says Jamieson. Clearly, there's a potential to decimate domestic retailers and distributors, while doing no good for the stated beneficiaries of the levy.

The CCFDA cites several further prob-

lems with the levy, including its application to media used for non-music-related storage. It notes that even according to music industry estimates, "less than half of the nearly 100 million blank CDs sold each year are likely to be used for home recording."

The CCFDA also points out that some \$28 million (some estimates run as high as \$32 million) has been collected under the existing levy, with nothing yet paid out to the supposed beneficiaries.

The Canadian Storage Media Alliance (CSMA), which represents recording media manufacturers, has specifically

requested that the Copyright Board impose a 25 per cent reduction in any final levy amount, reflecting the CPCC's failure to "diligently enforce the current levies and its failure to distribute the funds collected to date."

The CSMA also demands that levy payers get a rebate reflecting the interest collected by the CPCC on the undistributed money.

The continuing saga

The Copyright Board levy hearings are expected to take a month to six weeks, running through early March. Thus it

could be well into spring before a decision is published. When the final result is known, Jamieson expects that the various opposing companies and groups will "regroup" and see what further actions may be appropriate.

Ultimately, in fact, the important thing may be not winning this particular battle, but pursuing the war for rational legislation to its logical conclusion. "The Copyright Act as we have it in Canada isn't addressing much as far as living in a digital age," says Rothbart.

David Jones, president of Electronic Frontiers Canada, raises a more concrete

concern, warning that success with the blank-media levy could lead to a similar levy on Internet use. In fact, Jones suggests that the Canadian Recording Industry Association has been lobbying the federal government for the past few years to impose just such a levy.

Ultimately, these matters are still up to the voting public. The CCFDA states that it believes "that the legislation itself is fundamentally flawed and that efforts need to be directed at repealing the existing law." It suggests that comments be directed to the Minister of Industry and Minister of Canadian Heritage. ♦



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concern, warning that success with the blank-media levy could lead to a similar levy on Internet use. In fact, Jones suggests that the Canadian Recording Industry Association has been lobbying the federal government for the past few years to impose just such a levy.

Ultimately, these matters are still up to the voting public. The CCFDA states that it believes "that the legislation itself is fundamentally flawed and that efforts need to be directed at repealing the existing law." It suggests that comments be directed to the Minister of Industry and Minister of Canadian Heritage. ♦

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Confront the backdoor: Trashing spyware

By HAROLD LASS

Do any of these programs sound familiar — Bulla, Gratisware, High Traffic, Enliven, Hitbox? I operate behind a firewall and a virus shield and believed that ought to do it for security on the Net. But after installing and running anti-spyware software, up came these and 23 other positives. I wasn't so positive about my security any longer. Spyware is everywhere. Your hard drive is most likely harbouring some of it, but you can trash these unwanted intruders safely and for free.

Spyware (also called adware) is programming clandestinely placed on your computer, usually when you download and install software — often free. It gathers information about you based on Web sites you visit, for instance, and then relays that information to advertisers or other interested parties. The result? Spam.

Cookies are different. They aren't spyware. For one thing, you can disallow them, and for another, they can be useful, remembering login information and the appearance of your customized

browser pages, for example. You can also trash cookies easily and quickly from within your browser at any time.

So, how do you get rid of spyware?

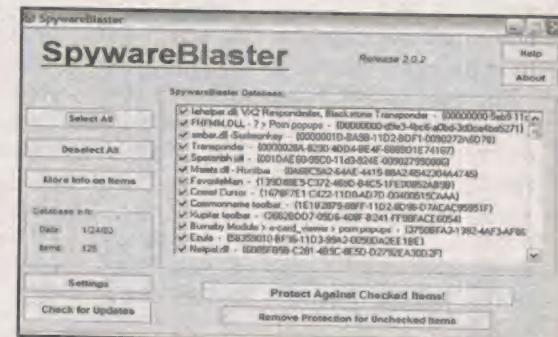
First you have to determine if you've been spied on. PepiMK Software's *SpyBot Search & Destroy* (spybot.eon.net.au) will tell you that. This free utility is simple to use and, what's even more important, remains up to date. Like a virus shield, the efficacy of this program is only as good as the accuracy of its database, and *SpyBot's* database is easily updated from within the program. This ensures that your hard drive will be scanned for the latest intruders.

Once a scan is complete and all the spyware has been detected on your hard drive, a click on "Fix selected problems" brings relief. Before you trash the unwanted intruders, though, you can request a description of any item chosen for deletion in case you're not sure about removing it.

But even if you do trash an item you may need, one comforting *SpyBot* feature is its "fail safe" restore function. After *SpyBot* removed all the spyware

on my hard drive, all sorts of error messages greeted me during the next boot. One of my utilities apparently required a program that had been removed by *SpyBot*. Not all spyware, despite its stealth, is necessarily evil. This one was not. Clicking on Restore corrected the problem. Then I configured *SpyBot's* Exclude feature to ignore this particular spyware during its search, removing the possibility of accidental deletion on subsequent scans.

Finding and trashing unwanted spyware on your hard drive is one thing, but it would be easier to shield your system from downloading these freeloaders in the first place. That's what *SpywareBlaster* (www.wilderssecurity.com/spywareblaster.html) is all about. Simply tell it what you don't want, and you won't get it. It's simple to use and effective. The software is free but a donation is requested. And its database, like *SpyBot*, is current. That's the problem with Lavasoft's *Ad-Aware* (lavasoft3.element5.com), a popular anti-spyware program that's been around for some time now. It's



good, but the freeware version database hasn't been updated for months. Dangerous.

One last word. Spyware is not the only way spammers can hunt you down. By using robots and spiders — software that probes Web sites for information — spammers can harvest your e-mail address from any Web site on which it appears. If you have access to the site's HTML code, travel to NetMechanic (www.netmechanic.com/news/vol4/design_no21.htm) to learn how to code e-mail HTML so as to render it indecipherable to spiders.

By the way, *SpyBot*, *SpywareBlaster* and *Ad-Aware* do arrive spyware-free. ♦

Digital music: Mac vs. PC

continued from page 19

Mac dominant. The scuttlebut is that as high as 80 per cent of the recording studios and pro musicians are working on a Mac. But that's partially because they have been doing so for a long time now — since before there was really a choice. They can be comfortable in their decision, though, because applications on the Mac continue to be as powerful and reliable as anything out there.

The consumer (or prosumer) market is another story. Ted Onyszczak, associate manager at Saved By Technology, a Toronto digital audio specialty retailer, estimates that 50 per cent of the music systems the company sells are on the PC. You can look at this two ways: Sure, Mac has a good base of 50 per cent of the market, but when the broader computer market is already divided into 90 per cent PC and three to five per cent Apple, well, you see the trend. If the average digital music hobbyist begins to recognize the potential of the lowly PC, the prosumer music market could be huge.

Here's the catch: Mac still makes the all-in-one-box. When you buy a Mac, it's ready to go. Pop in the audio software of choice, plug in the required equipment and you can mix with the pros. It's not that simple with the PC. As

Onyszczak explains, digital music is a very specialized group of applications. There are not only minimum requirements to run music software, there are also specific types of hardware to use in conjunction with that software. The combination of the two is again specific to what you want to achieve. It takes a bit of planning. One of the biggest mistakes Onyszczak sees is a young musician coming in, buying the latest recording software, then complaining because he can't get it to work properly on his "made in the basement" PC.

Making the right choices

If you're planning to venture into the world of digital audio, talk with someone who specializes in digital audio products. Let them know what you intend to do. Music software is all very similar. Most packages offer basic features such as creating, editing and sequencing. You have to find the one that is most intuitive to you. Then, add the right mix of hardware — both internally and externally (which could easily be another article). By actually putting together a system that is geared towards music creation, a PC will match the performance and stability of a Mac any day and for about the same price. But that's the secret — build the system for music. PC makers are pushing prices lower and

lower every day, but the components used in these entry-level machines are not up to the demands of an audio system. Spend the time, spend the money and you won't be disappointed.

Music software and hardware fall within a huge price range — you can spend anywhere from \$300 to \$30,000. What's the difference? Mostly hardware. A \$30,000 system that the pros use does all of the processing right on the third party hardware. This frees up the computer to do its work unencumbered. Latency is not an issue with a system like this. *Pro Tools* is the title of choice in this high end.

Names like *Digital Performer*, *Logic*, *Cubase* and *Cakewalk* all fall within the prosumer (and pro) market. You can spend \$1,000 and have a kickin' recording studio on your computer at home (either Mac and PC). Because the signals are all digital, the line between consumer and pro has been blurred. Anybody can record a tune with the powerful software and plug-ins available today. How you work with that tune with these tools is what makes the difference.

In the beginning of this article I went out looking for a fight. Mac versus PC: Who's winning? It quickly evolved. There isn't a battle going on. Most software is available on both platforms, and

where one is only available on the Mac, there's another that's only available on the PC. Which OS to use comes right back down to a matter of preference. If you've been a Mac user, you'll most likely stay a Mac user. A PC user may be inclined to switch sides, but it's not required. What matters is the music. Make sure the system you choose will be your intuitive tool. Learn how to get the sounds you want from it, and you will have made the right decision. Making the music should always be the goal, regardless of whether it's made on a Mac or a PC. ♦

more info

Digital music is quite complex. Talk with the pros and let them help you make an informed decision. To get you started here are some sites to check out:

www.savedbytechnology.com

www.ca.steinberg.net (Be sure to read about their InWire product that brings musicians together through the Internet to share and collaborate music)

www.yamaha.com (The company has an interesting new development called mLAN, which attempts to bring MIDI into the new millennium.)

www.m-audio.com (A one stop shop for the prosumer market.)

The Sheeba in Jane Siberry

continued from page 14

wool over her eyes. "I'm a little bit dangerous now because I know quite a bit," she says. "It's very interesting how many people are just blowing through their hats for a lot of money."

Being burdened with business work running Sheeba has taken a slice out of Siberry's creative life. "I did not do an original record for the first five years of Sheeba's life because I could not leave the office for long enough to immerse myself in it. I put out live recordings, traditional recordings, *Teenager* — which were my first songs that had already been written. That's the best I could do and it was all working towards having the luxury to release new work. It hasn't happened the way I thought it would. It's only now that I'm finally starting to work on an original record."

Siberry recently hired a business manager, Kim Cooke, and parcelled the fulfillment of record sales to the Canadian Internet music site MapleMusic.com. She sees that she needs a new start to her career. "People think I have slipped off the planet," says Siberry. "Except for a very small group of people who I think have had a wonderful adventure with me." Although she does not complain about the sales from Sheeba, she admits that, "Right now it is too much of a contained fan base. There is some expansion, but it is not enough to support new work." She has licensed some songs to appear in movies and television shows and will be looking to do more of this.

Jane Siberry was tired on the dreary February day we met at a Toronto coffee shop. She was up till six in the morning putting some new elements up on the Sheeba site. However, she paints a picture of herself as a stubbornly optimistic person. Not content to rest, she's off to New York for a show mid-February and then to Japan to record with Japanese artist Sotoma Takafumi. She is planning to have at least one show while in Japan. Siberry is working on a new Christmas album that will help her fund her first original record in six years, tentatively titled *Lily*. She is also working to develop a television show.

Up until now, her experience with Sheeba has been "very intense but ultimately very positive. I believe someone can exist as a creative force without needing huge sales and competing in that whole world." For Siberry, the creation of Sheeba was to further her musical goals. Although she admits that things did not turn out exactly as she would have liked them to, she is pleased with where she is and where she is going. ♦

ALL ITEMS IN STOCK @ BNC (WHILE QTY'S LAST)

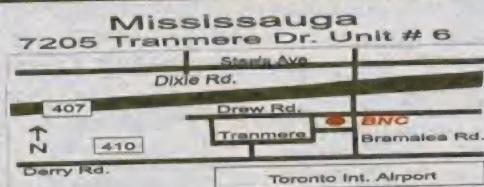
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Alan Thwaits

The
World
Is My
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It's time for a little experiment. Before you fire up your Internet connection for some heavy-duty Web surfing, try this.

Change your browser's default setting for cookies from "Accept all cookies" to "Warn me before accepting cookies," or the equivalent. (In *Netscape*, look under Edit, then Preferences, then Advanced. In *Opera*, look under File, Preferences, then Privacy. In *Internet Explorer*, go to Tools, then Internet Options, then hit the Privacy tab.)

Then visit a few of your favourite bookmarked sites. Try a few other sites, perhaps ones you haven't visited for a while. You'll very quickly come up against a lot of warnings telling you that cookies — small text files that track what you're doing — are being generated.

For that matter, you should know that a log of what Web sites you visit, what pages you access and how long you spend viewing each page is available to the folks who run your ISP (Internet Service Provider). Your boss may not be aware of where you go online, and you

You can run, but you can't hide

can keep that sort of thing a secret from your spouse, but someone, somewhere knows the truth.

Here are some more things to keep in mind. Next time you turn on your cell phone, remember that your service provider can monitor where you are — even if you don't make or receive any calls. If you do initiate or receive calls, the number you call (or the number that calls you), its location and the identity of that number's owner can be monitored. Use your credit or debit card at the department store or gas station. A convenient feature of modern life, isn't it? But your use of such cards leaves a trail of data about who you are, what you buy and how much you spend.

You're being watched. Does that make you uncomfortable?

The reality is, of course, that at present, cookies are used more for marketing than surveillance purposes. The technical staff at your ISP have more important things to do than track your surfing patterns on a day-to-day basis. There are laws governing to what extent your cell phone usage can be tracked, and the record of your credit/debit card purchases goes straight to another mar-

keting firm (unless, of course, that data gets stolen by someone else).

According to one recent estimate, the average citizen in the UK is recorded by a video surveillance camera 300 times each day. There are 1.5 million such cameras in use in the UK. We don't have quite that many here. But look up and around when you're shopping, when you walk past your local community centre or on any number of highway overpasses. Once you get into the habit of looking for them, you'll see them everywhere. And, if you live, drive and park in the city of Toronto, your licence plate may be scanned by the latest toy purchased by the city's finest — a roof-mounted camera on a police cruiser, feeding into an online database that tracks for outstanding warrants. But it also records every licence it sees, tracking where your car is on a particular day and at a particular time, even if you're the most law-abiding of citizens.

I don't know about you, but this kind of thing makes me very uneasy. I value my privacy and work hard to be sure that information about who I am and what I do goes out under my control and only to those whom I judge need it. Given the reality of living in a society abundant

with technology, though, the amount of control I have over those aspects of my life seems to be shrinking daily.

And I'm not the only one who is uneasy about this. George Radwanski, Canada's privacy commissioner, recently presented the House of Commons with a report (see www.privcom.gc.ca/media/nrc/2003/02_05_b_03_0129_e.asp for a summary) in which he warned against "falling prey to the illusion that wholesale erosion of privacy is a reasonable, necessary or effective way to enhance security." He was talking specifically about a government proposal to create a "big brother" database to fight terrorism, but he could easily have been cautioning us to take care generally.

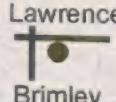
Maybe I'm just overly sensitive. Still, I'm leaving the "Warn me before accepting cookies" option turned on in my browser. Just so I know, in this case anyway, who's watching me and what they are looking for. It may be that I can't avoid being watched. But at least I'll know it's happening.

Alan Thwaits, a TC! Contributing Editor, is a freelance journalist who writes about computer, communications, and business technologies. He can be reached at praxis@pathcom.com. ♦

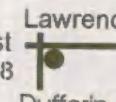
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SUPERTRAC (sx6000)

RoboDemo brings instructions to life

By DAVE CHAPPELLE

It's easier for most people to learn from a demonstration than from written instructions. While many companies have spent small fortunes on user manuals, some are taking the pictorial chart idea a step further, by using animated videos to teach customers how to use their product.

Software firm eHelp makes *RoboDemo* 3.0, a program for creating animated videos, especially tutorials. eHelp is best known for making *RoboHelp*, a popular program for creating online help files.

It might be an oversimplification to describe *RoboDemo* as an exceptional screenshot capture program with good editing features. It turns a series of individual frames into a movie.

This software isn't only for those writing tutorials. Home users can also apply *RoboDemo* by opening up photos in a browser or importing them into a *PowerPoint* presentation. Then, by capturing each image in a separate frame, a slide show can be assembled. Placing captions in your pictures allows you to recreate family in-jokes, oft-repeated remarks or even to make your subjects appear foolish.

Bear in mind that if you've got numerous images to arrange into a movie, the work can be tedious if you're opening JPEGs using *Internet Explorer*, which stubbornly refuses to point to the last directory opened when searching for files. The task is less monotonous when using an image manipulation program like *Jasc Paint Shop Pro*.

Open, record, click

To capture lessons pictorially, open the application you want to demonstrate and then launch *RoboDemo*. Set the amount of screen you want to display by sizing a red marquee with your mouse, and click on Start Recording, after which a frame is captured every time you click the mouse or press a key.

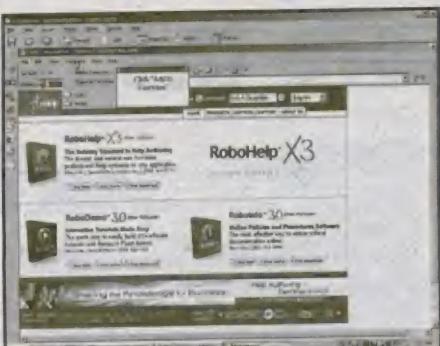
You can stop capturing at any time for editing. In the Frame view, each frame of your movie is shown as a separate icon. This makes editing simple, because

FTP for free

continued from page 28

to a server that supports SSH (Secure Shell). Contact your site host to find out if it does.

Remember, though, *WinSCP* is free ware. There's no cost or "drop dead date" associated with the program, but you use it "as is." There are some known bugs associated with the latest



the user can control what goes into each frame, as well as the order in which frames are presented in the movie.

From pull-down menus, captions and instructions may be added to a frame, including questions and pop-ups for correct and incorrect answers. You can set the movie to stop until the viewer correctly answers a question or clicks on a link and choose whether you want that to be a double or single click.

The viewing time of individual frames is also controllable, but we found the default length of two seconds per frame allowed plenty of time to understand what was going on in our movie. If you add one of many options for a control bar, viewers can control the movie the way they would control a DVD or MP3 player.

If you've already got .avi software tutorials, .tdp or .qvp project files or *PowerPoint* files, they can be imported into *RoboDemo* for editing. You can also insert any number of frames from these files into your existing project.

A movie project can be saved as different file types, including HTML, executable and Flash. Saving a movie file as an executable (.exe) file practically guarantees anyone with a Windows computer will be able to open your movie. However, doing so increases the file size, which may limit your ability to e-mail the file. If that poses a problem, you can try using file compression software like *WinZip* or *StuffIt* to shrink the file for transport. Or you can try saving it as an HTML file, which automatically creates a Flash (.swf) file of the same name. If you e-mail the HTML file to someone, you must also include the .swf

file, or the recipient won't be able to open it. Options also exist to export your movie to *Outlook*, *Outlook Express* and *Word*.

Using *RoboDemo*, anyone could display instructional videos and presentations from a Web site, a server on a network, a CD or even a floppy disk if the file was small enough, as ours was.

Upon installing *RoboDemo*, we experienced a slight hitch when activating the software. The opportunity to activate later was offered, but didn't work when we clicked the button. It took us a couple of attempts to log on to the eHelp Web site and obtain an activation number. The program required closing and restarting twice, then was able to accept the number. The program won't work without activation.

Clicking on *RoboDemo* Help connects to an eHelp Web site. Help files placed on the Internet worked seamlessly for us, even over a 28.8Kbps dial-up connection. Several tutorials are at the eHelp Web site.

However, *RoboDemo* Help and Tutorial functions only work if you're connected to the Internet. This could prevent work from being done when you're computer isn't connected — if you've forgotten how to do one thing, without an Internet connection you couldn't compose a *RoboDemo* movie in a remote location.

RoboDemo is fairly easy to learn. The instructions are light on a few details, but help is available. It wouldn't take long for a computer user to create useful tutorial movies. Now that we've seen it in action, we've noticed that some online courses and interactive specialty software instructional videos we've reviewed were apparently created using *RoboDemo*. ♦

more info

RoboDemo 3.0
\$609 (converted from US\$399)
\$273 for educational institutions (US\$179)
eHelp
www.ehelp.com

Requirements:
Pentium 200MHz, Win9x/Me/XP/NT/2000,
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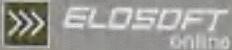
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Does the future of all computing involve portability? Microsoft and I appear to agree that the answer is a resounding YES! Since the introduction of the first Palm Pilot back in March 1996, through to the latest and greatest TabletPC, handheld computing has become the norm. Can this trend continue until the average home or business user foregoes a desktop computer, or will today's portability die a horrible death like the Apple Newton?

Handheld PDAs

When you think about it, what task does the average computer user require that is too difficult or complicated for a Palm or PocketPC? Long time *Toronto Computes!* readers know that I'm an accessory junkie for my Palm units and I use my Palm for close to 80 per cent of all my personal computing. Lately, I've been taking advantage of end-of-stock items as vendors significantly reduce the price of older Palm III-style components. My ever-growing collection now includes two keyboards (one folding, one GoType Pro), a Kodak PalmPix digital camera, a Palm Navigator digital compass, the Palm Modem, a Palm GamePad, Landware's GoVox digital voice recorder and the SiPix IR printer. All of my articles are written on my Palm, and I no longer use my desktop for any gaming. Since I'm frequently traveling on business, I use the built-in applications extensively, coupled with Eudora e-mail client. Its biggest shortcoming for me is Web browsing — that 160x160 screen just does not cut it.

TabletPCs

With Microsoft and numerous hardware vendors pushing TabletPCs (www.tabletpc.com), the distinction between notebook, handheld and desktop computer has been blurred even more. Touch-screen computers have been available for years, but not with the sophisticated handwriting support included with Windows XP Tablet PC

Edition. Much more than a combination of a pad of paper, PDA and notebook computer, I envision sales of these devices to quickly exceed those of notebook.

How small?

At Comdex Las Vegas in November, Fossil Inc. (www.fossil.com) won a Best of Comdex award with its Palm OS wristwatch. Its feature list is almost identical to a Palm III — check out its illuminated 160x160 touch screen with a stylus integrated into the band for Graffiti input, 2 MB of RAM and 2 MB of ROM, 16 levels of greyscale, an IR port, rechargeable battery and the default Palm OS applications. Dick Tracy, eat your heart out.

So, how small can a PDA be without losing its main functionality? Having a contact database on my wrist sounds like a great idea, but I shudder to think about composing this article on my wristwatch. Still, I want one of these devices.

Cell phones are computers

Besides making calls, you can use your cell phone to access the Internet, send e-mail or text messages and even play games. The line between cellular phones and full featured handheld organizers has been crossed with the Handspring Treo.

These devices fully integrate a Palm OS handheld with a digital cell phone. Available in Canada for use on the Rogers AT&T Wireless (www.rogers.com/treo) network, it features always-on wireless access to the Internet, e-mail, two-way text messaging and wireless phone capabilities. I want one of these, too.

The state of notebooks

Even with the popularity of handheld computers and the new TabletPCs, notebook computer manufacturers are not sitting still. These devices are lighter and more powerful than ever. Many people are foregoing a desktop machine and just using a notebook.

Oh sure, desktop computers are still going to be popular, and I'm confident that they will be the norm for many, many years. But the future of computers is in miniaturization and portability.

Personal e-mail to Kevin Linfield can be sent to linfield@rocketmail.com. ♦

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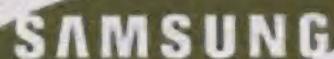
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Palm gets boost from bonus software

By NESTOR GULA

While the desire to use the Palm m130 as a way to get organized was the underlying reason for embarking on an exploratory journey with PDA devices, there were other reasons as well. I reasoned that as a writer, I could use one as a very portable word processor, thereby eliminating my reliance on notebooks and the always agonizing task of deciphering my handwriting.

The Palm m130 is powered by what would now be considered a woefully underpowered processor — a speedy 33 MHz. This PDA has a full 8 MB of memory. A regular desktop computer with these standards would be languishing in a landfill (if improperly disposed) or sitting forlornly on the bottom shelves of the Salvation Army or Goodwill thrift shops. However, I think back to my first computers. The Amiga 1000 had a processor with a clock speed of a smidgen over 7 MHz. The Macintosh 512 had a faster processor, at 8 MHz. Both of these machines had but 2 MB of memory and no hard drive. My first PC had a 16 MHz processor and 4 MB of

RAM. I reasoned that if I could have written on machines that slow for such a long time, it should be no problem with the Palm's power.

Productivity power

The Palm m130 came with a bunch of bonus software. Most interesting to me was the package from DataViz. Titled *Documents To Go*, this suite of applications lets the Palm view and edit Word and Excel files. It also allows you to review PowerPoint files, although there is no editing function for those. The translation power of this program is not limited to Microsoft products; *Lotus 1-2-3*, *WordPerfect* and other files will also be translated for use on the PDA.

The word processor, called *WordToGo*, is very simple. It's a bit like SimpleText for the Mac or Windows' Notepad. There is not much frill here. You can bold, italicize and underline words, change the colour of the text, change the alignment of paragraphs and perform very simple cut-and-paste edits. This is more or less what I need from a word processor. Actually, it is more than I need — I never use the colour option in any document I

ever write. If I need colour or a fancy layout, I use a desktop publishing program. I am very happy with this word processor. I wrote this article using it.

The spreadsheet program, called *SheetsToGo*, is a basic spreadsheet, reminiscent of the shareware spreadsheets that were available years ago. It does the job — I took a few spreadsheets from work and loaded them on the Palm. I was able to do everything I needed to do with them. However, this is where the processor's speed, or lack thereof, shows up. If you put a large spreadsheet on the Palm, like I did, then you will be waiting around for quite a while, waiting for the calculations to be made — just like you used to in years gone by. It is best to use simple spreadsheets without colour on the Palm.

Picture show

Another bonus software package that I use is MGI's *PhotoSuite*. Now, you will not be able to edit your photographs on your Palm. *PhotoSuite* is there so that you can view and beam your photos. Photos can be viewed individually or as a slide show, a very nice feature. The



photos can have notes attached to them. Since the screen is a small 3.5-inch TFT active matrix display, you will not be getting a super image, but it is quite adequate and you can zoom in and move the image around, while zoomed, with the stylus.

The Palm bonus software gives this handy organizer lots of power. I'm not giving up my desktop computer just yet, though — I still need it to download all the information I put into my Palm. Incidentally, this article took up 5 KB of the Palm m130's 8 MB of memory. ♦

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Fujifilm FinePix M603: Looks can be deceiving

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Fujifilm digital cameras are renowned for their striking vertical design and for packing a lot of features into a small package so the camera can grow with the user's skill level. While the M603 stays true to the "looks great on the outside," it's missing many of the features found inside earlier Fujifilm digicams.

The huge 2.5-inch TFT LCD screen, complete with flip-up screen hood, side mounted zoom, shutter, flash, macro buttons and the included attachable handle makes the M603 look like the medium format camera of the digital photography realm. However, with no way to change shutter speed, aperture, focus (either a manual focus option or the ability to change the spot the camera uses to focus) and without any of the other features that make for an advanced digital camera, the M603 comes off feeling more like an

overblown point-and-shoot affair.

The features Fujifilm is most hyping on the M603 are the high resolution (relative to other digital still cameras) movie capture and simple onboard editing functions.

Where most digital cameras capture video at 320x240 resolution, the M603 doubles this de facto digicam standard to 640x480 at 30 frames per second (fps). Using the AV out jack and the included cable, the M603 can show full screen video on a standard TV at the same resolution as a basic analogue camcorder, though as it is captured digitally, it looks sharper and less grainy.

The downside of this new and improved movie capture is that it seems to have been done at a cost to the camera's still picture functionality. As a 3.1 effective megapixel camera, the resolution and trueness of captured images is excellent, but the quality of the pictures suffers, as users have no

access to the options Fujifilm digital cameras usually offer.

On the outside, the M603 looks like a very advanced camera that, instead of blurring the line between film and digital, is creating a whole new category of prosumer digital cameras that make no apologies for being such.

The most notable features in the appearance of the camera are the aforementioned large LCD display and the grey screen hood that folds up to block glare. In another paradigm shift for consumer level digital cameras, the M603 comes with a fold-down handle that attaches to the tripod mount on the bottom of the camera. With zoom, shutter and flash, and macro buttons mounted on the right-hand side when looking at the display, the camera is easy to hold



more info

Fujifilm FinePix M603
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www.fujifilm.ca

and operate.

With such a large display, users will have to forgo the familiar viewfinder when using the M603, but aside from the battery life concerns, the LCD works well for composing and taking pictures. Users can temporarily brighten the display by pressing up on the navigation pad, which makes composing in low-light conditions much easier than with other digital cameras using an LCD display.

However, with none of the options that Fujifilm has classically included in its higher end digital cameras, and with a price tag of close to \$1,000, shutter bugs would be well advised to wait until the company perfects its latest creation. The huge LCD screen and functional hand-grip make the M603 is a radical step for consumer level digital cameras, but without the options that provide photographic flexibility usually found in Fujifilm cameras, it's not just not ready for mass consumption. ♦

All-in-one possible

By MARA GULENS

When you have the opportunity to review a machine like Epson's Stylus CX3200 "all-purpose printer, scanner and colour copier," especially since it comes with so many smart options, you can't call it a day until you've tried it all.

I'm an auto-mode girl, meaning that, for better or worse, I don't like messing with adjustments. When it says "click cancel to cancel scanning in full auto mode and switch to manual mode," my tendency is to not click.

So, what happens when you put items through the test trusting the natural smarts of the machine? It depends on what you're printing, scanning or copying, and it depends on how much you're willing to give the machine the benefit of the doubt.

For starters, the CX3200 is smart enough to know a photo is a photo. In fact, it can even tell there are two photos on the bed, and scan them in as separate files. Auto scans of 1978 photos were wonderful and reminded me how far we've come in terms of photo development (Was that a blue day or a foggy

day?). Print-outs were good enough to make this unit worth considering as a photo printer.

Photos taken with flash in a dark setting were a tad problematic. The CX3200 got a bit confused and started madly pixelating, trying to make drawings out of photos. Ditto my beautiful January Enbridge gas bill. As a copy it looked great, although the blue background was auto-corrected to the point of being invisible. But when I scanned in the gas bill, the Stylus decided this particular item should actually be in black-and-white. Which brings me to giving the machine the benefit of the doubt. Maybe gas bills shouldn't be in colour.

To get an accurate colour scan, I went into manual mode, which has enough options to satisfy any techno-fieid. The rest of us will probably be happy just qualifying image type and then pressing continue. The print-out of the scan was a close match to the real thing.

Besides being able to preview and set colours and contrasts before wasting paper, the biggest difference between scanning and printing, and just plain copying, is that scanning takes a long



more info

Epson Stylus CX3200
\$279
www.epson.com

time. Apparently scanning in micro-seconds is still in the distant sci-fi future.

My one word to describe this machine would be "options." From printing, to scanning, to copying, the user has a choice of whether to do all that via the computer or the on-machine controls. Then, whether to go auto or manual. Then, whether to scan to application, e-mail, Web or file.

The Smart Panel software that comes with the machine is the on-screen interface used to control all this. Although there has obviously been an attempt to create a user-friendly interface, the text on the right side is still too geeky. Moreover, enter manual mode and you're deep in tech land. And how about copying. As the unit warms up, we're advised the machine is "checking input and output devices." I'm not the guy working behind the desk at Kinko's — give me language I can understand.

A few years back, when computers hit

the scene, it was enough to own a printer. Then it became nifty to have your own copier. These days, with digital cameras inspiring people to also digitize old family photos — scanners are becoming de rigueur too.

In fact, this unit made me start thinking about archiving my mom's shoebox photo collection. Experts caution that scanners under \$2,000 won't do the pictures justice. But most of us will probably never own scanners at that price, and wouldn't it be better to digitize the images before they disintegrate?

Be forewarned that the Epson Stylus CX3200 takes up a big chunk of desk space. In fact, for every square foot you recover by owning a flat screen monitor, you'll give it back double with this printer, scanner, copier.

I assume someday that won't be the case. I also assume sometime in the not-too-distant future these all-in-ones will come with flash card adapters and roll paper holders, just like Epson photo printers. Add that, and what more could you possibly ask for? ♦

Digital Shots: Catching the action

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

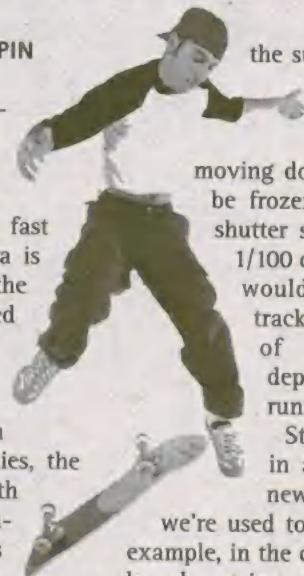
The raison d'être of any camera, be it film or digital, is to capture a moment, freezing it in time to view and remember at a later date. The key to catching fast action is to ensure your camera is moving as fast as or faster than the subject. This can be accomplished in a number of ways.

Stop motion

Freezing a moving subject in the frame is, as the name implies, the goal with stop motion shots. With some consumer level digital cameras, this can be difficult as users might not have access to the settings required to adjust the exposure value enough using the shooting modes that lower-end digital cameras offer (portrait, indoor and action, for example) instead of giving access to shutter speed and aperture settings.

Stopping the action in its tracks can still be accomplished though by choosing the 'action' mode and setting the ISO value as high as possible. As we've discussed in previous columns, the ISO is a holdover from film photography and indicates the speed at which the camera will capture the light that comprises an image. The higher the number the faster the image will expose, though the grainier the end result will be, as some detail must be sacrificed in favour of a faster exposure.

If your camera gives access to shutter speed and aperture settings, you'll want to adjust the shutter speed to make it as fast as possible relative to the speed of



the subject while still allowing enough light for a balanced exposure.

For reference, a car moving down a city street would be frozen in the frame with a shutter speed of approximately 1/100 or above, while a runner would be stopped in his tracks using a shutter speed of 1/60 or even 1/30, depending how fast the runner is moving.

Stopping the action dead in a photograph can give new perspective to images we're used to seeing in motion. For example, in the case of a skier or snowboarder going down a hill, hitting a jump or doing a trick, having a piece of the action frozen in time gives viewers a chance to appreciate the nuances of the action, like a spume of snow being kicked up, an expression of joy (or sheer terror perhaps) that couldn't be fully appreciated if seeing a moving image or the action itself. Experiment with different moving subjects to discover the best balance between a good exposure and stopping the action in its tracks.

Blurring the action

While stopping a moving subject dead in a picture can give new perspective to the action, creatively blurring the action can add a sense of motion to your images.

To effectively blur images and get the end result that you're looking for, it's helpful to understand how to take stop motion pictures. In essence, we want to use the settings required to stop the

action dead and tweak them so the subject or background is blurred. A slower shutter speed will accomplish this. Also, since we'll be using a slower shutter speed, we can lower the ISO rating so the camera will capture more detail.

Using the snowboarder or skier example again, a shutter speed of about 1/60 will provide a very slight blur depending on the speed of the subject, while 1/30 will blur the subject more and so on.

The central focus of action images is obviously going to be the body in motion. To avoid blurring said subject while still using motion blur to add a sense of movement to the image, we can use a slower shutter speed and pan the camera with the subject as it moves past. With a little practice, this will sharpen up the subject considerably while blurring the background to lend the same sense of speed and movement.

Alternately, a tripod-mounted camera using a slower shutter speed will blur the subject and will also give viewers a sense of motion in the frame.

Composition tips

Aside from having to figure out the shutter speed, aperture and ISO settings that will allow photographers to either stop the action dead or use blur creatively, we also have to think about the subject's placement in the frame.

I'm sure we're all getting sick of constant reminders of the Rule of Thirds (dividing the frame into thirds vertically and horizontally and placing central subjects where the lines intersect) but it will again come into play when capturing action scenes as still photographs.

Action photographs should give view-



ers a sense of motion, and it is important that motion not be broken by the edge of the photograph. That is to say, give your subject room to "move" within the frame or, more accurately, allow the viewer's eye to follow the path of said movement without falling out of the edge of the picture. For example, if a runner moving from left to right is captured on the right hand side of the frame, the viewer can only see where the runner came from in the left of the frame, as opposed to where she is going in the right of the frame. Similarly, centring a runner in the frame doesn't help viewers to get a sense of motion from the picture, as the runner is no closer to running out of the frame than she is running in to it. Leave room for the subject to move into instead of out of the frame.

As with most rules, the Rule of Thirds and others in this and previous columns are made to be broken, but it is important to understand the rules so they can be broken effectively. Know the basics and then experiment adapt them to your own personal style. ♦

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Musical Odyssey: Making your voice heard

By NESTOR GULA

In the recent past I mentioned that recording bass guitar and drums at home is very difficult. The most frustrating thing to record is the vocal. It has to be perfect. The vocal is the focal point of any song because the human ear is naturally drawn to it. If your song has a meaning then that meaning has to be heard. While a drummer can miss a beat or the guitarist can flub a note, these inaccuracies frequently lend the song a "human" quality, the vocalist has to get it dead right.

The mic's the thing

Getting a good vocal sound recorded is not too difficult. You should invest in a good microphone because it is the most important piece of equipment in recording the voice. A bad microphone will never give good results. While in a professional recording studio a special vocal condenser microphone will usually give the best results. With most home recording situations you will be using a good quality dynamic microphone.

The vocalist should be positioned about six to nine inches (15-24 centime-

ters) away from the microphone. Too close and you will get the popping of various letters, especially 'b' and 'p', and the changing of levels every time the singer moves slightly. Too far and the vocal track will sound distant. The singer should also be told to pull away from the microphone a bit when increasing the volume of his or her voice to not overload the signal. The microphone should be mounted securely on a stand to prevent the singer from drastically changing the distance between themselves and the microphone head and from causing any interference by obstructing the rear of the basket that can change the performance of the microphone. Some people like to use a pop shield between a singer and microphone. These can be bought or made using some pantyhose and wire coat hanger. Place the pop shield about three inches (7.5 centimeters) from the microphone.

After getting the microphone set up the next important step is to have the vocalist know exactly what they are to sing. Minimize the distractions and make sure they are comfortable so that the singer can concentrate on the job at hand. A very important thing for a good vocal

track is for him or her to sing in tune and with the beat. When the vocalist is comfortable and not stressed this will happen. Remember, you have to get it perfect. You will not get it done on the first take. Not on the second or third either. Do not settle for "that's OK." You will then feel the need to redo the vocals when you are doing the final mix of your song because it just does not sound right.

Computer tweaks

Recording onto a computer's hard disk has many advantages over a tape system. First – in many recording software programs you will have unlimited tracks so you can rerecord all the takes and take the best snippets out and reassemble them together. Second – you do not have to record the whole song in one go but can record one verse at a time or use the same great chorus track and repeat it when needed.

Other advantages of recording on a computer arise when it comes to adding effects. Unless you know exactly the sound you will want you will tend to record the vocal tracks dry – meaning with no effects present. A dry vocal track means that you can do all sorts of

nonsense to it in the editing program. If you have a vocal track with the effects already applied then there is no way to undo this. Some software recording packages have non-destructive editing that means that the original recorded track is not changed even though effects are added to it. Even if I am using a software package like this, I always make a copy of the track and add effects to the copy so that I can hear the difference the effect makes. The most important effect that should be added to the vocal track is compression to even out the inadvertent unevenness of the vocalist. You can add as much or little as you feel you need to get your track to sound right. Don't use a lot of reverb – the tendency is to use a lot so you should avoid it.

When doing the final mixing of the song, be sure to put the vocals forward in the song. They should stand out well amid all the other instruments. Too often the vocal track gets buried in the mix and the result is a very murky sounding song. ♦



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Adventures in digital video: Ahead ... by a nose

By LEE RICKWOOD

When creatively composing or framing your video shots, you may want to keep in mind the Rule of Thirds and the Golden Mean, as we discussed in previous columns.

Of course, you may want to skip the heavy math and just follow your nose.

Image composition and camera framing techniques are as many as they are varied. What looks to one person like a well-balanced, evenly proportioned shot may appear stale, stagnant and boring to someone else.

Put another way, the story you tell with your images can turn out quite differently, depending on the way you frame those images. Taking a different perspective on the same subject always leads to something new, something unexpected, something creative.

But creative composition and image framing shouldn't mean leaving stuff out. Think of structuring your shot as a way to emphasize a particular part of the scene, and a way to reinforce the message. Especially when shooting people (in the video sense), camera composition says a lot about them, their sig-

nificance to the video and their importance to the viewer.

Head room

Head room usually refers to the amount of space in a picture above a subject's head. For example, putting Grandpa's face in the centre of your shot will leave extra space above his head. Too much space, in most cases. He could look smaller, shorter and less significant as a result.

Following the Rule of Thirds, his eyes should be placed about one third of the way down the frame. That means less room above his head and more emphasis (screen space) for his face.

Nose room

Nose room refers to the amount of room in an image between a person's face and the edge of the frame to which they are looking (nose room is not an issue when a person is looking directly at the camera). Squishing a person's nose up against the side of the frame feels uncomfortable — looks that way too — both for the subject and for the viewer.

The implication of someone looking off-camera is that they are looking at something important; give them the space to do so.

Of course, this concept applies to objects, too.

If you are shooting a boat, a truck or something with a definable front and rear, make sure its nose is not slammed tight against the frame.

Leaving space between the object and the frame is especially important when the subject is moving (again, not directly toward the camera, but from side to side).

A person moving left to right across your frame should have some extra space on the right side of frame, in front of the movement.

This gives them room to move, a sense of direction and destination (unless you're shooting a slap-stick comedy, it also helps them look like they are not about to walk into a wall).

Psychologically, viewers are more comfortable when there is empty space (proper head room, nose room or "leading the action" room) between your subject and the edge of the screen. Your videos will be more visually pleasing, and will not fight your storyline, if you compose properly.

Think of the implications of your framing, refer to the rules when necessary — but always follow your nose and your adventurous instincts. ♦

Some composition guidelines

Fill the frame with important, engaging material; avoid empty, wasted space.

Refer to the rule of thirds — and have a good reason to break it.

Action should move into the frame; use lead room appropriately.

People should look across the frame; use nose room properly.

Different views create different perspectives — your compositions should support your story.

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Digital Words: Scanning images

By JEFF CHAPMAN

In most desktop publishing projects, the task is to refine two large piles of raw materials – text and images – into a presentable form. Unless you intend to rely entirely on clip art, you're probably going to import some images, and some of those images will probably come from a desktop scanner.

About a decade ago, scanners were rare, bulky and expensive toys. Scanners for PCs required the user to install special cards and drivers, replace the fluorescent tubes fairly often and clear off a large surface to accommodate their massive footprint. Today scanners are pretty much plug-and-play on both PCs and Macs, and they've become both smaller and more reliable.

Almost every consumer scanner bills itself as being TWAIN compliant, meaning that it should be compatible with any Windows or Macintosh operating system. Some of the latest scanners are scarcely larger than a binder or textbook. The average price of a desktop scanner has fallen from more than \$1,000 to around \$150, and scanners have become a common accessory for anyone interested in desktop publishing.

Scanners typically come with a small scanning utility from the manufacturer; this scanning utility can either be used as a stand-alone program or behave like a component of a photo editing program like *Adobe Photoshop*, *Ulead PhotoImpact* or *Paint Shop Pro*. These scanning utilities all have different looks, different interfaces and even different names for their various functions, but they really all do the same thing.

Most scanning utilities can operate in three different modes: Black-and-white (or line art), greyscale or full colour. The black-and-white mode is normally used for scanning in text, diagrams, engravings and other illustrations where shading isn't an issue – each pixel will be scanned in as either a white dot or a black dot. Since they have so little bit depth, black and white images typically need to be scanned in at a higher resolution than greyscale or colour images. A good rule of thumb is to scan black-and-white images in at the same resolution you intend to use when you print them out.

The greyscale mode is used for images that have shading but no colour; some professionals suggest never scanning in greyscale mode however, since this mode only recognizes 256 different

shades of grey. Full colour mode, on the other hand, sucks in every bit of hue, luminescence and saturation the scanner can squeeze out of the picture on the platen. Naturally, the more bits one uses the larger the scanned image file will be.

The size of the final result is also affected by how closely one chooses to examine the original image. Most scanners these days can make out at least 1,200 pixels per inch (ppi) of the original image, but there's normally no need to scan at such a high resolution unless you are scanning film. A resolution of 300 ppi will work for most purposes. If you have trouble with odd moiré patterns when you scan in photographs from magazines and brochures, try acquiring the original at a high resolution and then lowering the resolution later.

Scanning utilities are usually equipped with a decent toolkit of additional filters, levels and whatnot, but most of these can be safely ignored. You may want to turn on the "descreening" mode if you're scanning from a magazine, but normally one can and should make all changes to the image from inside the imaging software. Imaging software usually has much more powerful and flexible controls than a tiny

scanning utility, as well as the ability to save changes and undo mistakes.

Once you've successfully imported the image into your imaging software, you can either save it as is and then edit a duplicate, or if you're feeling reckless, just plunge right in and edit the original scan. One of the first things you can do is get rid of any resolution and bit-depth that your final project won't need – there's no sense in waiting for your imaging software to calculate how best to rotate a 1,200 ppi, 24-million colour image if your final product is going to be a three-inch-square picture in a photocopied zine or newsletter and you can get away with working with a 266 ppi greyscale image. After this, it's usually a good idea to use the sharpen command to sharpen the image a little (most images lose a little sharpness during the scanning process, as well as anytime their resolution is lowered) and to modify the image's colour levels so that the blacks are totally black and the whites are totally white. The image can then be saved in an appropriate file format.

In the most straightforward cases, that's all there is to it, and these freshly mined raw materials can be carefully sorted into the appropriate pile. ♦

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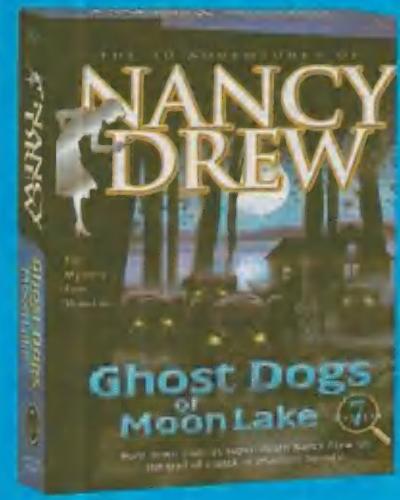
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All prices are C/B discounted and subject to change without notice.

22680414



By MARA GULENS

It's a crazy thing, these interactive Nancy Drew titles. They're addictive in much the same way the books were years ago. Fans wait expectantly for the next instalment, and eagerly crack open the box to launch a game they hope will be more challenging, more interesting and yes, scarier, than the ones that went before.

Her Interactive's message board is the place to go for help in solving these interactive mysteries. It's also the place to find exclamation mark-filled reviews written by the girls who play them. "I loved this game! It was scary, fun everything!" writes one junior detective. "OMG!!!! ... It was totally awesome!!!," writes another.

Ghost Dogs of Moon Lake is the seventh title in the series. Like the ones that came before it, there's plenty of searching for clues, plenty of conversations started up just for the sake of gleaning information and plenty of wild goose hunts — either because Nancy didn't get it right, or because the player-as-Nancy messed up.

But I'll start with what's new to this game specifically, and how that, in turn, keeps players waiting for more because they sense that, at least so far, there's more to the Nancy Drew game machine than just pushing out a title. It actually seems like some thought goes into development.

First off, this is the first title to come with a strategy guide. Previously, girls got an empty notebook, and general game tips that told you how to move the cursor/magnifying glass. Read this guide and you'll actually get a sense of the storyline (in fact, one 30-something mom I know got a kick out of just reading the guide). Most super sleuths, of course, won't go near the guide, preferring to get help from friends online and off, or to just suffer through it. That said,

Nancy Drew finds fear in the Ghost Dogs of Moon Lake

the guide doesn't totally crack the code anyway. For example, the map helps you get through the maze-like forest, but a maze is still a maze.

Ghost Dogs is also the first Nancy Drew game set primarily outside. Given that these games like messing with clocks, thereby moving time ahead, this is a nice addition. When you go upstairs to sleep, you have the choice of having the alarm wake you up AM or PM. Come back down at PM and the phantom dogs are out; wake up AM and you'll hear birds chirping. Since certain things can only be done at certain times of the day (just as in real life), you'll really appreciate this tool. The motor boat, for example, can only be used when the sun is shining.

Much has been said about the fear factor in this game, and it's not an easy thing to evaluate. The old Nancy Drew books worked on the powers of the imagination, and I remember being scared silly by a crude hand-drawn

image of a face reflected in a window. Well, much has changed, and these interactive game titles are proof of a change in sensibility. This title really strives to frighten, with shaking walls and actual 3D phantom dogs barking outside. Scary stuff! But strangely enough, it seems that to girls these days, this is the equivalent of a hand-drawn image.

Like any computer game, you might suddenly find yourself doing something you thought you'd never do, like using a computer within a computer at the Ranger Station, or jumping between the game and Her Interactive's Web site to find out "OMG, how do you do it????"

The real effects of the game, like pumping water and cruising across the lake in a powerboat, make you crave more. Give me the wind in my hair. Let me jump in for a swim. It's just proof of how much the visual presentation is improving.

Because the game attempts to parallel

life, if you get too hung up with solving the mystery and start following the path outlined in the guide too closely, you might actually miss something. And because the game is supposed to be like real life, players will get incredibly frustrated when they can't access this or find that. At least now, with the guide and the message boards, players have a way out — if they want it. ♦

more info

Nancy Drew: Ghost Dogs of Moon Lake

\$29.95

Her Interactive

www.herinteractive.com

Girls 10 and up

Requirements:

200MHz Pentium processor, Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP, 8X CD-ROM drive, 16 MB RAM, 160 MB hard drive space, 16-bit colour graphics video card, 16-bit Windows compatible stereo sound card, mouse and speakers

March break at the computer

By MARA GULENS

Chances are if you're not going away for March break, your kids will be spending some time at the computer. Check that everything on your system is working properly (sound, video, no viruses) and decide beforehand how much time is allowed. It's no different than TV — time flies, and before you know it, your kids will have spent half the day glued to the monitor.

Since March break in the city wouldn't be complete without outings to some of those favourite spots, like the Science Centre and the ROM, I've included sites that help locate what's on. You can only spend so much time at the computer — even if the surfing is amazing. Happy surfing — and tobogganing.

Colouring pages

Little kids can't get enough of colouring pages, and they really enjoy choosing which pages to print. Start off by giving kids a choice of theme or topic, and then let them pick their own pages. Some sites even offer "no line" colouring pages — meaning no image, but an interesting frame.

- www.preschoolcoloringbook.com
- www.sesameworkshop.org/sesamestreet/coloringpages
- coloring-page.com

- www.coloring.com

Games ahoy!

If you've never played a flash game, you can bet your kids have. Games can be seasonal (try skiing down a hill), and generally touch on just about any topic you can think of. Besides that, most interactive sites today start out with a flash presentation.

Some girls love the Barbie site, which lets them play games, give Barbie a makeover and create a skating show. From there you can link to Barbie's "sister" sites.

Aliveis.com is the place to go for wacky new beat-the-computer games, which you can also download and play offline. Whatsherface lets girls dress their girl, create music mixes and dance videos and even design printable CD covers. Funschool has an unbelievable array of games and activities for preschool to sixth grade. All flash — easy to get hooked.

- www.barbie.com
- www.aliveis.com
- www.whatsherface.com
- www.funschool.com

Out and about in T.O.

You have to wonder how we ever thought the yellow pages meant we had information at our fingertips. The Web is



www.e-kidstoronto.com

YAHOO! LIGANS!

the Web Guide for Kids

a much better tool — especially if it happens to be information gathering about March break. There's no better place to start than e-kids Toronto. The site has amazing lists of things to do — everything from how to create a party to local resources in French. (No doubt by March the site will have a specialized version for March break, although this was not available at press time).

They even list where you can go to skate and toboggan. E-kids is also your best bet for finding absolutely every kid-friendly spot in Toronto (like the Zoo, the ROM and the Science Centre). Just for fun, check out [Toronto.com](http://www.toronto.com) for stuff like movie listings and TTC fares and schedules.

- www.e-kidstoronto.com
- www.toronto.com

Links to links

There are so many kids' sites on the Web that it's hard to know where to begin. Here are some sites whose job it is to point you in the right direction.

- www.childparenting.about.com/library/weekly/aa05119.htm
- www.yahooligans.com
- www.kidsites.com ♦

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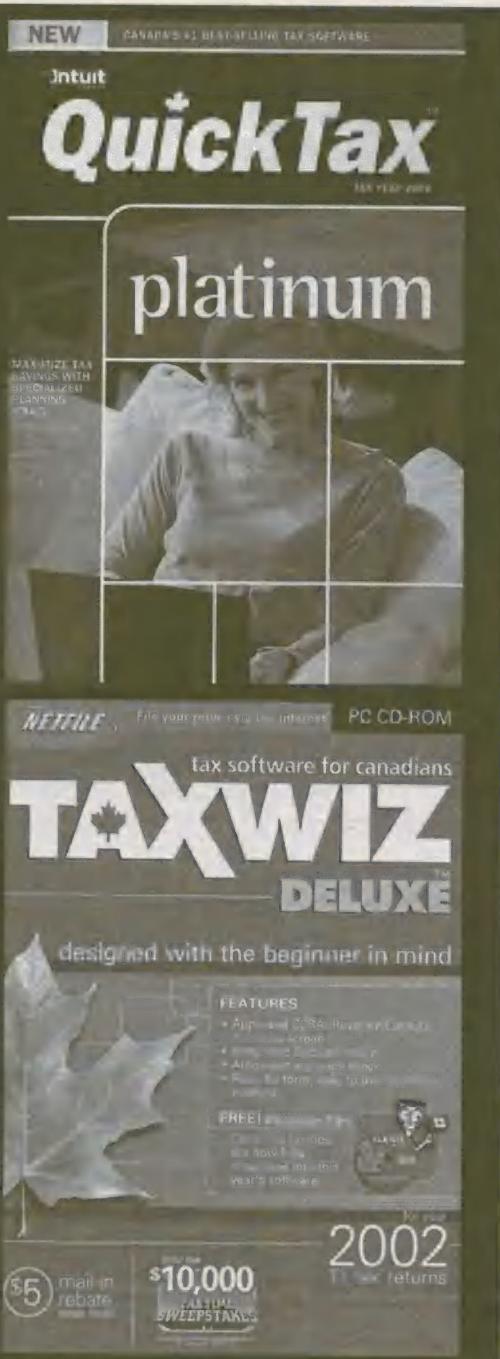
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Minimum requirements:
Windows XP/ME/2000/98/95, 100 MHz processor, 32 MB RAM, 14 MB hard disk space 4x CD-ROM or faster, Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5, 800x600 with 256 colours, printer

Internet connection required for Netfile



Filling out your tax return is usually a depressing time.

By NESTOR GULA

Not only do you realize how much of your paycheque gets deducted for tax purposes and other "incidentals," the end of this arduous task is rarely fulfilling. The best case scenario results in, "Oh, I get a few bucks back," while the worst case results in you shelling out more money to the government.

Tax software that eases the pain of filling out the seemingly endless tax forms has been around for a while. In Canada there are two main software makers that provide full-featured tax preparation programs — TaxWiz, with its self-titled package, and Intuit, publisher of QuickTax. Both packages feature forms that are certified by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, allowing you to print your forms or Netfile them.

QuickTax

Before rushing out to buy *QuickTax* for yourself and the family, you should consider which of the six versions of *QuickTax* you really need. *QuickTax Standard* is the one you will see displayed as you walk out of most business supply stores these days. This gives you a basic tax preparation package for six individual tax returns plus an unlimited number of returns for those with incomes of less than \$25,000. *QuickTax for Investors* contains the standard version of *QuickTax* plus special tools that track investment transactions and provide carry-forward data needed each year. It includes tips on maximizing tax benefits for investors. *QuickTax for Small Business* includes *QuickTax Standard* and tax tools that help self-employed or small business owners with deductions. The new *QuickTax for Retirement Planning* is designed for retired Canadians or those planning to retire within the next 15 years. It has tools that monitor investment strategies and help users maximize the tax advantage of various contributions. It also has *QuickTax Standard*. *QuickTax Platinum* contains all of the above. *QuickTax T2 for Incorporated Business* contains *QuickTax Platinum* and various tools for incorporated businesses. All of the versions include an Incorporation Analyzer that helps determine if incorporating a business is the right decision.

The main tax forms in *QuickTax Platinum* look almost like the paper versions you can pick up at the post office. However, there are many tools that help you fill out your tax information. Instead of hunting for the special forms that you inevitably need, you just click on the field and the form pops up. Using the tax tools is another matter — they are easily summoned but tend to fill my head up with way too

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Dwayne R. Brown.

Mac Chronicles

It's that time of year when we start to feel the effects of winter. The holiday season is long gone. It's been a while since we've had time off work. It's been cold and dark for months now — what are we to do? Do the words "March Break" mean anything to you?

Over the next few weeks, many of us will find refuge from the bleak Canadian winter in some sunny southern destination. While you're packing your bathing suit, sunscreen and sunglasses don't forget to throw in your Mac.

Apple laptops are among the most sought after computers these days. The power and features packed into them rival any desktop PC. The one major difference though — you can bring it with you. And why not bring it with you? A laptop on vacation doesn't have to mean work. In fact, a Mac on vacation can only mean one thing — fun.

Now, for this scenario to be realistic, you have to know that most of us — especially those who read these types of

For those who haven't switched

magazines — enjoy being "wired." When the electronic store flyers show up on the doorstep each week, we begin to drool. That's the frame of mind you have to be in. Okay? Good. Here's what you need to pack: Your laptop, iPod, digital camera, digital video camera and all the accessories that go with each item. One thing you do want to do before packing your laptop though, make sure all your favourite songs from your CD collection are loaded into it. Now you're ready for your digital adventure.

It's always simple, stupid

The first thing to do upon arrival at your sunny destination is to scope out your surroundings. Load a couple dozen of your songs onto the iPod. Simply plugging in the FireWire cable and dragging your songs to the iPod icon will accomplish this. Now take your iPod and stroll leisurely about the island, taking in the sites while listening to your favourite tunes. Wait, before you leave, take the digital camera too. You should probably snap some photos of the sights that catch your eye. That way, when you get back to your room, you can plug in that USB cable and instantly transfer them to

iPhoto. Don't worry about having to load other software — *iPhoto* will take care of it. You can give your iPod a break and listen to your music from *iTunes* while you check out the pictures you snapped during the day. What you might notice is that the songs don't stu, stu, stutter and the pictures don't take forever to flip through. That's because OS X works on the Unix system. Each program essentially runs in its own little world. In fact music, and the way it is handled, is controlled right from the heart of the operating system. You can be running several applications simultaneously and your music will continue to play uninterrupted.

It's always cutting edge

You've gone through your pics and decided to revisit a couple of areas. Grab the digital video camera and start shooting. Shoot as much as you can in a day, and when you get back to the laptop, plug in the FireWire and transfer the footage into *iMovie*. It's about as easy as transferring the photos — except there's sound and motion. When the footage is loaded, put together a small video that highlights your travels that day. Add a soundtrack using your favourite songs in *iTunes*, or

pop in some of the stills you shot with your digital camera. Compress it and e-mail it to your friends back home in the snow. Hey, since you can now reuse the videotape, do it each and every day to remind them what the sun looks like. They won't be seeing it for another month. I'm sure they'll thank you.

It's always fun

After a few days you'll begin to realize that all the work you've done digitally has not one bit interfered with your vacation. You haven't had to yell at the computer because it wouldn't load a program. It didn't crash right in the middle of your transfer, download or dancing. As a matter of fact, you've probably started to look forward to getting out of the hot sun and back to being creative. Does that sound geeky and strange? Not when you're a Mac user. ♦

more info

Unreleased at the time of this article was a new suite of "i" products called *iLife*. It includes upgraded versions of *iTunes*, *iPhoto*, *iMovie* and *iDVD* that are even further integrated. Read all about them at www.apple.com/ilife.

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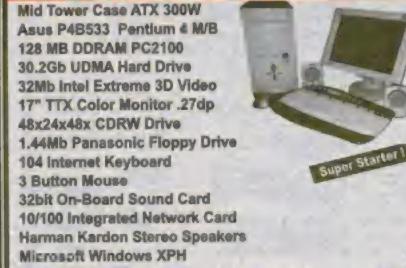


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Sounds fine: Audio libraries online

By HAROLD LASS

Listen. The Net is alive with the sound of music — and a whole lot of other sounds too.

If you're interested in space, travel to NASA's Audio Gallery at www.nasa.gov/gallery/audio/index.html, where you'll find not only shuttle flight audio but also "The Space Story," several NASA-produced radio pieces from 1994-95.

Computer Talk streams on the Internet (www.combeat.com/othershows.htm) and is loaded with links to live and archived radio shows like "Your Mac Life," "Surf's Up" and "WebTalkGuys." They cover a wide variety of computer topics.

The Harvard Law School Forum (www.law.harvard.edu/studorgs/forum/index.html) features a database of audio discussions on a wide variety of legal, social and political issues. Past speakers include Ralph Nader, Ted Turner and Frank Serpico. After a visit to this site, you can say you've been to Harvard.

Dino-Roar (www.sciam.com/explorations/121597dinosaur/index.html) is a computer simulation of what scientists think Parasaurolophus sounded like 65 million years ago. The related article also provides background information about this and other dinosaurs.

Need sound effects for your multi-media gems? At FindSounds (www.findsounds.com/types.html) there are hundreds of sound clips. Just click and listen to sounds from animals to vehicles and everything in between. For a more complete sampling of animal sounds, travel to members.tripod.com/Thryomanes/AnimalSounds.html.

Seasonal sports broadcasts are available online. Hockey, for instance, can be heard for free at www.nhl.com/intheslot/.

ten/radio, major league baseball at www.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/audio/mlb_gameday_audio.jsp, some professional golf games at The Golfer's Network (www.broadcast.com/sports/golf/golfersnetwork/) and basketball at www.nba.com (you have to pay for the basketball broadcasts). It's a nice way to stay sports current when you're stuck at the computer monitor.

Readings from Kurt Vonnegut, Anne Frank, Edgar Allan Poe, J.R.R. Tolkien, William Shakespeare, and other authors are available online – with some, but definitely not Shakespeare, reading from their own works – at Harper Audio (town.hall.org/Archives/radio/IMS/HarperAudio). Vonnegut, for instance, reads from *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Of course, there's a whole lot of music out there. Take your choice of music from around the world: Africa (africmusic.com), Iranian and Turkish (www.iranian-midi.com), folk music of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (www.contemplator.com/bycount.html), Jewish (www.library.upenn.edu/friends/freed/sampler/index.html) and Reggae (mikestrickland.net/reggae). Finally, for a relaxing audio mood, step way back in time and listen to the Internet Renaissance Band (www.csupomona.edu/~jcclark/emusic/index.html). ♦

moreinfo

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[memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edsndhm.html](http://www.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edsndhm.html)

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Portable drives keep data at hand

One of the "benefits" of modern software is that the files it creates are big. Also the files we download from the Internet are bigger – especially the audio and video. Consequently, if you want to carry them with you or move them from computer to computer, you have a little problem. The poor old floppy disk, all 1.44 MB of it, can't begin to store today's files.

If you have a CD recorder, it presents one solution to the problem – just cut a CD of files to be shuffled. But if you're continually wandering between two sites or working on two or more un-networked computers, all of the systems involved need CD-Rs to make swapping work effectively.

Some users resort to e-mailing files between work and home, or from friend to friend. Of course, that only works if the connections are fast enough, and if there are no (or generous) size limits on mailboxes. Also, up- or downloading a 5 or 10 MB attachment over a modem

connection can be a tedious and unhappy experience.

They didn't have that kind of problem on *Star Trek* or *Babylon 5*. *B5*, in particular, had some cunningly designed gizmos known as data crystals that stored huge quantities of data in spikes of a transparent material resembling short fat icicles, that could be hidden in a closed hand.

Well, good news – truth and fiction are starting to converge.

How would you feel about being able to hold 256 MB, or even 512 MB of storage, in the palm of your hand?

Clever little gadgets variously known as flash USB drives and USB disks (among other things) are small enough to double as key fobs, yet store up to 512 MB of data. You simply plug one into your computer's USB port and access it as though it were a disk drive. No fuss, no muss and no batteries required.

Data crystals, anyone?

These USB devices need no special drivers to be recognized by Windows 2000, ME or XP or Mac OS 9 or X; Windows 98SE users can also access

them with the installation of a driver. Obviously, the operating system must support USB, so Windows NT 4 users are out of luck.

If the computer's motherboard has the appropriate circuitry, some of the drives can even act as boot devices.

If that's not enough storage, if you have a pocket to spare, today you can buy physically small but logically hefty (20 GB and up) hard drives that connect to the computer via USB or FireWire (IEEE 1394). Many tuck neatly into a pocket or purse and a couple even draw their power directly from the computer rather than through an external A/C adapter. If your system supports the new USB 2.0 standard, you'll get up to a whopping 480 Mbps transfer speed.

It sure beats the humble floppy drive.

Later this year, another ultra-portable storage device is expected to hit the market. Storcard plans to release credit card sized portable devices with the ability to stream audio and video content at its native speed. For multimedia and gaming, they'll be the answer to many users' prayers.

As well, they are described as the industry's first intelligent media with

the ability to authenticate an individual's identity, encrypt and secure data and to enforce policy information on how and when the data may be used.

The security of portable drives has become critical, as more users transfer valuable business data or personal files on removable devices. If the drive is abducted or lost, with encryption at least the thief won't have easy access to your confidential information.

Some of the USB flash drives also offer encryption. Since they are poised to become floppy disk replacements, it's a sensible precaution. Like floppy disks, they are small and easy to forget or lose. And, like floppies, they're an ideal mechanism for passing files from friend to friend, though you won't be giving them away as you would a 69-cent floppy, at least not yet. They cost \$25 and up each.

I can see the day, though, where they could be cheap enough to treat like disposable commodities. And perhaps, in time, instead of hauling laptop computers around, people will simply pocket their removable storage devices and plug them into public machines wherever they go, just as they used to do with floppies. ♦



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By GEOFF MARTIN

Fans of the jam-rock band Phish have long been following the band on tour, and freely trading copies of live performances (with the band's blessing) in the grand tradition first inspired by devotees of The Grateful Dead. Now, in addition to hopefully making a buck or two for themselves, the band is aiming to make it easier for fans to get their hands on copies of their live shows, by making copies available in the form of paid downloads from the band's official Web site.

Visitors to www.phish.com can now enter a special section offering digital versions of their concerts taped directly from venue soundboards for a fee of US\$10 to \$13. The shows are often posted as quickly as 48 hours after the final encore has been played and come with specially designed cover art that paying fans can print out and add to their collection

Something Phishy going on



after burning a CD. The concerts are available in either MP3 format, or Shorthen (SHN) files, which is a so-called "lossless" format for true audiophiles. There are no restrictions on the files after they've been downloaded

(unlike the products of other online music services), which means that a user can burn the files onto CDs, transfer them to portable digital audio players or listen to them on a computer as often as they choose.

The band still has the most open taping policy in effect since the demise of The Grateful Dead, which allows for fans to tape any show they wish to, as well as to trade any show with other fans, as long as no money is exchanged. Happily, even though they are now providing downloads for a fee from their official site, this policy remains in effect – the band says it simply wishes to provide fans who have not yet cracked into the trading underground with an opportunity to get their hands on decent copies of the live Phish experience.

From all angles, it looks like a wise and magnanimous gesture from a band who was already the-long-reigning "World's Most-Wired Band," as declared by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Norwegian parliament saved from invading robotic hordes

If a quick security camera glimpse of a Greek politician caught pumping money into a video gambling terminal was enough to prompt a ban on all public video games in Greece (as reported in the October '02 issue of *TCI*), all bets are off as to what might happen in Norway.

Trond Helleland, a member of parliament from Norway's ruling Conservative Party, was recently caught by television cameras playing a video game on his Pocket PC while his fellow MPs were busy debating such mundane matters as their country's possible participation in a US-led war against Iraq. This was no quick-hit game of Solitaire, either, as Helleland twiddled away for seven agonizing minutes after the television cameras had zoomed in on his pitiful activities from behind. The entire spectacle was replayed on national television newscasts in Norway and elsewhere, causing considerable embarrassment for the easily distracted Helleland and his colleagues.

The game he was playing is a space shooter called *Mystion*, and Helleland

made several very sad attempts at preserving his dignity by offering several explanations for his actions to the online Norwegian newspaper *Nettavisen*. Helleland crowed that he had simply turned on his Pocket PC to check his appointment calendar, but that his "finger slipped" – a slip which, at seven minutes, could make it the longest such boo-boo in human history. Besides, he added, as if it made a difference, the game he was playing was "nothing bloody," and only involved shooting unmanned robot drones.

He had already just handed them the equivalent of journalistic gold, but chortling reporters didn't even need to offer Helleland a shrevl with which to further dig himself into a dank hole of lies, as he voluntarily went on to add the cherry on top by claiming that his obvious entertainment with saving the universe via his PDA had not impaired him at all from following the debate on the floor.

Sure, as soon as he finally beat that pesky Level 5 boss and earned his bonus man, that is.



RIAA reveals fondness for threats ... and cheese

Who are we going to pick on when the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) finally gets its act together and manages to get a grip on the decade-old potential of the Internet? Sadly for them, and happily for us, it's likely a question we won't have to ponder for some time.

Apparently feeling impotent after several failed attempts to shut down post-Napster peer-to-peer file-sharing networks such as Kazaa, and while it is mired in a lawsuit with US ISP Verizon to cough up the name of a single file-trader who was caught sharing hundreds of files over a P2P network, the RIAA is now talking tough to Fortune 1000 corporations. Thanks to a strongly worded six-page brochure that came complete with a sample memo demonstrating how to introduce new anti-piracy policies to their employees by threatening termination, the message from the RIAA to the Fortune 1000 is clear:

Prevent file-sharing on your corporate networks, or we'll sue your suspenders off.

Noting that the majority of file-trading happens on college campuses and over corporate networks, where both bandwidth and storage space are in abundance, the directive from the RIAA reminded the corporations that back in April, it successfully sued an Arizona company and reached a \$1 million settlement after it was shown that the company's servers had been used to trade thousands of copyrighted music files.

While it plays sheriff across the vast territory of the Internet, which it claims to understand so thoroughly, the RIAA's own Web site was recently severely hacked for the sixth time in the previous six months. Recent hacks have rendered the site inaccessible for as long as three days, or simply caused embarrassment by, among other things, offering pirated music for download and having its press section open to any hacker who wished to forge a press release. For several hours, many hackers took advantage of this most recent opportunity by posting press releases outlining the RIAA's love of cheese, or their support of amorous relationships between humans and animals.

Musicians everywhere are surely sleeping soundly, knowing that such competent scholars of the Internet are watching their backs. ♦



Launch superstars in Rock Manager

By CHRIS TALBOT

Childhood fantasies of belting out a tune on stage in front of 10,000 people won't be realized by playing *Rock Manager*, but at least players will get a chuckle from loading up this off-the-wall take on the business side of rock 'n' roll.



This strategy game puts players in the shoes of a rookie rock band manager who has just raised \$100,000 to put together an act and use them to generate some profit. As the game starts, players will have to hire a band from a bunch of colourful characters. Each potential band member has personality traits (like Glen, who constantly tells you to "f*** off"), musical skill (from nada to excellent), and star power (some are born to be stars, others are not). Each band member (you can have five in total – and the max is recommended since a bigger band seems to make better music in this game) demands a particular salary per week. Budget accordingly and get them to work quickly, and all will be well.

After a band has been hired, it's time to get to a publishing company and buy the rights to a song from the publisher's catalogue. Songs have titles like "Kids Gonna Riot" and "Kill Your Parents." The genres range from pop to punk, but the punk bands are the most fun to start with.

Once players have a song in their possession, they'll have to rent studio time and record a demo. Depending on the studio chosen, players will be able to tweak the sounds and sound effects on a recording. Obviously, the more expensive the studio, the more recording technology players will have access to. If the band sucks though, players can send them off for music lessons to improve their skills.

Farming out the demo to a record

label is the next step, and if the band blows, labels will not-so-politely tell managers to get lost. My band, The Atroshus Leeriks, recorded four demos before they were offered a contract with Rebel Records.

Players can book gigs at venues ranging from small cafes to big stadiums, and once the album is cut, they can design the jacket, bribe the media for attention, offer stores discounts to push product to unsuspecting rock fans and spread rumours (slanderous or positive) about the band to get some hype. It's even possible players will have to field interview requests from the local music magazine.

In addition to the simple business aspects of rock 'n' roll, players will also have to deal with unruly musicians. In the second scenario, managers must try to keep a brother band (quite obviously based on the Gallagher brothers from England's Oasis) from breaking up so they can perform at a major concert in a couple of months. Keeping them happy with gifts of beer, liquor, hockey tickets and other items is a necessity. Occasionally, it may help to send a band member off on a vacation to chill out.

Scenarios run the gamut of rock bands. In some cases, players must make a star out of a Russian mob boss's daughter (guess what the penalty is for failing) or help an aging rock band make a comeback. When one scenario is completed, another will open up, but players can also go back and replay their favourites.

Rock Manager is a hilarious and fun game suitable only for adults. Foul language, politically incorrect stereotypes, and all the trappings of rock 'n' roll (drugs, alcohol, etc.) are found in the game. It's definitely not for kids, despite the sometimes childish humour that runs amuck within. For strategy gamers with a love of rock and/or roll, it's highly recommended. ♦

more info

Rock Manager
\$29.99 (est.)
DreamCatcher
www.rockmanager.net



Requirements:
Windows 95/98/2000/XP, Pentium 233 MHz
MMX processor or better, 32 MB of RAM, 16 MB video card, DirectX-compatible 16-bit soundcard, 100 MB of free hard disk space.
A sense of humor

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By NESTOR GULA

Most people know the details of the Allied invasion of France on June 6, 1944. Less than a year later, on May 8, Nazi Germany was defeated. There were many hard-fought battles in the days after the Allied invasion of Normandy, and *G.I. Combat Episode 1: Battle of Normandy* attempts to capture these, with a fairly well executed 3D strategy game.

Players get to control either units of the 1st Infantry Division of the United States Army, or the German units that manned the Atlantic Wall. The game is a squad level game, with the player controlling units rather than individual soldiers. At most, you will control 120 soldiers arranged in units of varying strength. By using the mouse and keyboard, you position your units in tactically advantageous locations to engage the enemy. Both sides have a historically accurate complement of weapons at its disposal. The American side even has the option, in some scenarios, of calling in naval bombardment from ships positioned in the English Channel.

Before diving into the game, it is always wise to take some basic training. The basic training in *G.I. Combat* is very simple. The five components teach you how to move units, either infantry or tank, and call in air or artillery support. The training does not cover tactics or

G.I. Combat: Past the beach at Normandy



fine points of the game. Fortunately, the manual, although relatively short at 50 pages, is very comprehensive and quite helpful in gameplay, without going overboard with useless detail.

There are 25 scenarios, five operations (which comprise several battles tied together in a sequential fashion) and four campaigns (which can be fought in a non-linear manner, depending on the outcome of the previous battle). Although the screen looks a bit confusing at first, you soon get the hang of contacting all the various units and ordering them around. A bar on the bottom of the screen displays all the units at your disposal and

their status on two scales: Morale, which runs from obeying orders to going over the edge and Strength, measured from good health to dead or disabled. When clicking on an individual unit, the status of individual soldiers is displayed: Psychological State, which is measured in seven levels, including Fanatic, Heroic and Panic. A unit that has taken casualties becomes quite ineffective and must be rallied by an officer. As the game progresses, you must move your officer from unit to unit to motivate and rally them, encouraging them to do their duty.

Individual games can last anywhere from 15 minutes to many hours. Games

end when all the soldiers from one side are dead or incapable of putting up much of a fight. You can always have your side surrender when you realize that you have no chance of success. Graphics in *G.I. Combat* are not bad, with enough detail to make the game look semi-realistic. Once you venture to the edge of the battle area, you get a generic green ground, blue sky and trees in the distance.

This is a fun game to play. I was frustrated a bit at first until I read the manual — then things started to click. I still was losing the scenarios but not as badly as at first. For those who think the prepackaged scenarios, operations and campaigns are not enough, Strategy First included an easy-to-use Scenario Editor. *G.I. Combat* also has a multiplayer option that can be used through the Internet or a LAN. ♦

more info

G.I. Combat Episode 1: Battle of Normandy
\$64.99
Strategy First
www.strategyfirst.com



Requirements:
Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP
500 MHz CPU or higher
128 MB RAM
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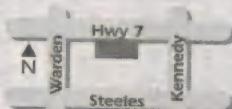
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Is this tiny Game Boy a big deal?



This month, Nintendo will launch its new Game Boy Advance SP, a redesigned version of the popular Game Boy Advance.

In case you're wondering, "SP" stands for "special."

This new machine, available on March 22 in Canada for \$149.95, features a flip-screen LCD display and something Game Boy players have requested for years: A built-in front light to illuminate the screen.

Richard Ow, senior account executive at NPD Funworld, a leading market research and measurement firm, says the Game Boy Advance SP is a "big deal" for the industry.

"For Nintendo to continually advance their product line is a great thing for the category," says Ow. "These advancements, such as a new, smaller shape and front light show that Nintendo is conscientious of their consumers and their needs."

Ow says both of these advancements

help promote the player's portability. "Now the GBA can be played anytime, anywhere, even in the dark."

Much of Ow's sentiment is mirrored by Craig Harris, editor-in-chief of IGN Pocket (pocket.ign.com), the Web's leading video game site that caters to the millions of Game Boy Advance players.

"The only real complaint about the GBA hardware is its lack of built-in lighting for the reflective LCD screen, making it very difficult to see the on-screen image without needing to find specific places to play the unit, or holding the system awkwardly," says Harris. "Nintendo also wants gamers to take advantage of the

GameCube-to-GBA connectivity, and without a light on the LCD screen it's hard to do that."

Harris says the Game Boy Advance SP may also be a way to rejuvenate sales.

"Nintendo didn't sell nearly as many GBA systems worldwide as anticipated when they first shipped the GBA to stores in 2000. But the GBA system is selling very well — even though the sales might not be meeting Nintendo's projected numbers," says Harris.

Nintendo has revamped its hardware in the past to kick-start its unit sales. The company has done it with the

Nintendo Entertainment System, the Super NES and Game Boy.

Harris says much of the reason for the redesign is to get the unit into the hands of the older, more tech-savvy crowd.

"They made it look less like a toy and more like a gadget on purpose ... Nintendo is synonymous with the younger gamer, and it's an image that Nintendo's been trying to shake," says Harris.

"Plus, it's another way to steal the thunder from the increasing popularity of the cell phone gaming market," adds Harris.

The Game Boy Advance SP will also address another common complaint from users regarding the machine's power. Instead of buying disposable or rechargeable AA batteries, the new device will be powered by a built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery that will last anywhere from 10 to 18 hours, depending on whether the front light is turned on.

All current and future Game Boy Advance games are compatible with the new system, which will also play older Game Boy games. ♦

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Impossible Creatures:



RTS with a twist

By CHAD SAPIEHA

Set in the 1930s, *Impossible Creatures* is a real-time strategy (RTS) game starring Indiana Jones-ish reporter Rex Chance. Rex is searching for his father, Dr. Erik Chanikov, who, unbeknownst to Rex, has seemingly been doing his best to become something akin to H.G. Wells' notorious Dr. Moreau. The game begins with Rex having trailed his father to a remote chain of islands in the South Pacific, where Rex is almost killed by some very strange monsters. He's quickly rescued by the bold, brainy and beautiful Lucy Willing, who once served as his father's assistant. Lucy quickly tells Rex about the mysterious experiments

his father was conducting: Combining animal DNA to create hybrid creatures with a mish-mash of the source animals' original abilities. Now it falls to Rex to pick up where his pater familias left off, creating mutant animal armies to defeat those who betrayed and kidnapped his father.

Most of the fun in *Impossible Creatures* lies in creating these "impossible creature" armies. While the battling portion of the game is entertaining, RTS gaming strategy has been well developed by a number of other franchises, such as *WarCraft* and *Age of Empires*, and *Impossible Creatures* simply can't match the delicately balanced tactics these games incorporate. Whereas the best RTS games focus on creating a fine equilibrium of units for all sides with ideal countermeasures for every sort of attack and defense, creating such evenhanded armies in *Impossible Creatures* is usually something of a fluke, especially if you're in a multiplayer environment where players are going into the game without knowing their opponents' playing style.

However, *Impossible Creatures* excels in one area most other RTS games do not: Variety – and weirdness – of units.

So, as you begin to play *Impossible Creatures*, expect to spend more time mixing and matching DNA to create powerful creatures and less time worrying about tactics. According to Relic Entertainment, the game's developer, tens of thousands of units can be created by combining in various ways the DNA of the 50 or so animals Rex takes samples of over the course of the game. All of the animals you create will have basic attack capabilities, but depending on the creatures you mix, some will have special attributes such as electric shocks, poison gas attacks, heightened defenses and flying abilities. Keep in mind, though, that combining an eagle with a skunk won't necessarily mean you'll create a flying, poisonous monster; you must make sure the proper bits of each animal are used, in this case the wings of the eagle and the tail of the skunk.

Thankfully, combining animals is easy to do. As you choose this body and that head, a table shows how powerful – and expensive – the resulting creature will be. The rest of the interface is standard for RTS games. Players have the ability to pan, rotate and zoom the camera; they can create unit groups for quick

control and program their behaviour to settings like guard and attack; and they can build structures and creatures by clicking on easily identifiable menu icons. Veteran RTS players will probably be able to figure out most of the game on the fly without ever accessing the tutorial or reading the manual.

The visual and audio elements of *Impossible Creatures* are good without demanding an impossibly high-end machine. Players with equipment that meets the game's minimum requirements won't experience much in the way of choppiness or slowdown, even when scores of units are traipsing across the map.

Impossible Creatures will likely end up being a pleasant diversion for hardcore RTS fanatics, and a more accessible – though somewhat trippy – experience for those who find most RTS games too intense. ♦

more info

Impossible Creatures
\$54.99
Microsoft
www.microsoft.com/games/impossiblecreatures
Requirements:
Pentium II 500 MHz, Windows 2000/XP/ME/98, 128 MB RAM, 1.5 GB free hard disk space, 4x CD-ROM, 16 MB 3D video card



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The Sims gets lost in the online translation

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Who'd have thought that people would want to spend leisure time taking care of mundane tasks like cooking, cleaning and fixing things around the house?

The Sims was a blockbuster success and gamers came out to live a second virtual life and everything that comes with it in droves.

However, the same can't be said of the online incarnation. EA has said it is disappointed with the number of players willing to shell out the US\$9.95 per month to inhabit the virtual world of the Sims; 82,000, well shy of the already modest goal of 200,000 by the end of March.

We tested the Charter Edition of the game, which comes with three months of online play time and some extras in the box, like a magnet, keychain and a limited edition certificate and another \$25 added to the price. The Sims Online basic

package comes with a one month subscription and none of the superfluous extras mentioned and goes for \$49.99.

The uninitiated might be asking themselves, what is this Sims thing I've been hearing about? Essentially, gamers are responsible for the health and well being of one or more virtual beings (Sims). They must take care of the Sim's every need, keeping an eye on the Energy, Hunger, Comfort, Fun, Hygiene, Social, Room, Fun and Bladder bars. If a bar starts creeping into the red zone, gamers must take the appropriate actions to get them back up into the green or face the consequences. If your Sim is ignored for too long, he or she will give visual and vocal signals saying what's wrong, be it a bladder about to burst or personal hygiene so bad no one will come within 10 feet. If ignored a little bit longer, your Sim can die, or perhaps just wet his or her pants and then be in dire need of a shower.

It's a strange concept for a game, but



more INFO

More Info
The Sims Online Charter Edition
\$74.99 (estimated)
Electronic Arts
www.ea.com

Windows 98/ME/XP, 500 MHz Pentium III or AMD Athlon processor (700 MHz recommended), 128MB RAM, 4X CD/DVD ROM drive (24X recommended), 1.6 GB free hard drive space, 2MB video card (8MB recommended), 28.8 Kbps Internet connection (DSL recommended)

given the popularity of past Sims titles and expansion packs, one that has worked.

The Sims Online adds new dimension to the Sims formula by making every Sim a sort-of real person, that is to say, there is a real person behind each Sim. However, in adding this new dimension, the familiar The Sims gameplay falls a

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CYBERPLAY

The Sims gets lost
continued from page 55

bit flat.

While keeping your Sim in good shape is still the main point of the game, having many other Sims controlled by a real person as opposed to AI makes *The Sims Online* rather like a graphically enhanced chat room. As with more traditional chat rooms, acronyms abound and people often have precious little to talk about. Rather, every comment, whether amusing or not, is met by a chorus of LOL's (laughing out loud), by far the most ubiquitous expression in *The Sims Online* or ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing), which is reserved for special occasions, like when something is actually funny. Example: Sim 1: I have to go to the bathroom. Sim 2: lol ok, Sim 3: lol, Sim 4: hehe lol, Sim 1: brb ... lol.

The point of the game (if it can rightly be called such) is to amass skills in various areas of expertise like Mechanical, Logic, Charisma and Body. To build up these ratings, Sims read books, do research on the computer, play chess, work out, etc.

When gamers first enter the Sim world, they will notice that *The Sims Online* isn't your typical MMOG (massively multiplayer online game). There are no weapons in the game, no baddies

and no PKs (player killers), unless of course, gamers are sadistic and decide to kill off their own character through neglect.

Gamers looking for the same gameplay as other *Sims* titles might be disappointed, as the game often comes off as an overblown chat room instead of an actual game.

Without a serious investment of both time and effort, building a thriving household is much more difficult than in past *Sims* outings. Instead, gamers will probably end up becoming a roommate in an established house and putting the 10,000 Simoleans (the game currency) they are given at the beginning of the game to use in building a cooperative household.

The benefit of building a large house is that other Sims will begin using the property for skill building and money making while the owner and roommates take a cut of the earnings and can sell food and other necessities to the patrons.

The Sims fans with a penchant for online chatting will want to give this game a look but for all but the most dedicated *Sims* players, much of the game's charm is lost when taking it online, though this will hopefully change as the online game world progresses. ♦

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Distractions with Flash

Just for a few minutes — you can stop anytime you want. Really.

The Internet is a double-edged sword. During any given day, I frequently turn to it for answers to pressing questions, for information and to communicate with friends and family. And almost as frequently, I get sucked into the vortex of time-eating online activities that don't contribute in any way to my pressing questions, need for information or the quality of my relationships.

I'm sure I'm the only one with this particular weakness, and many people are probably wondering right now what could possibly be so distracting online. Indeed, there are probably many of you who might like a little distraction to, say, take your mind off work during your 15-minute (and not one second more) coffee breaks. Well, why not try some Flash games? They're free. Just for a few minutes — you can stop anytime you want. Really.

How about making President George W. Bush dance with Britney Spears?

Players control the dancing by clicking their choices in a list of moves, and there are several variations of this on www.miniclip.com, including one that has British Prime Minister Tony Blair doing aerobics in front of 10 Downing Street. These are pretty much guaranteed to be a hit around the office, if you're all, ahem, taking coffee breaks at the same time, or um, maybe during lunch.

Miniclip also offers a digital version of that classic office distraction — bubble wrap popping, with a handy indicator to help players gauge just how bored they are in their jobs, in case that hadn't already occurred to them.

Having a bad day? Maybe a bit of Whack-A-Boss will do the trick (www.jeffpaige.com/flash/whackaboss.shtml). If you've ever played Whack-A-Mole, you already know what to do, and it's probably much less damaging to your career than hitting your real boss over the head would be (unless, of course, you're doing this while you're supposed to be working).

By the time March rolls around, win-

ter has lost much of its charm and can incite quite a lot of frustration. Why keep it all bottled up, when you could be mowing down happy-go-lucky skaters with giant snowballs (www.orisinal.com/games/snowbowling.htm)? You'll get bonus points for hitting two skaters with the same ball, but don't ask me how long it takes to match the high score, which is sitting around 32,000 as I write this. If you try, expect your coffee to get cold, and it won't be because of the snow.

Snowbowling is only one of many original and visually beautiful Flash games on Orisinal.com, all of which were designed by Ferry Halim, an artist based in Fresno, California. In Midnight Serenade, the player catches roses his sweetheart throws from her window while he plays his guitar for her. As you might imagine, the neighbours are somewhat less enamoured with the romantic gesture and are tossing things out of their windows as well.

In Penguin Panic, frightened penguins dash to and fro because "They heard that

the hole in the ozone layer will soon melt their home." Your mission is to freeze them before they hurt themselves. Not sure why being frozen is better.

If the job and the city are really getting under your skin, perhaps a career change has come to mind. What could be further from a fast-paced urban life than the life of a shepherd? Green grass, fluffy white sheep, quiet days in the sun — get a taste of the job at www.davidlewis.com/sheepgame, where players herd sheep through courses or into pens with the mouse. I'm going to hazard a guess that you might find sheep no easier to corral than your coworkers.

Finally, for those who need a few minutes to back up the data in their brains, the most mindless and compulsive game I saw anywhere was Kickups, at www.spikything.com. The idea is to keep the soccer ball in the air by "kicking" it with your mouse before it bounces. It's harder than it sounds. And if you find yourself still doing this long after your coffee break ends, please, get professional help. Have you no willpower? ♦

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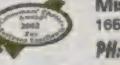
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It wasn't that long ago that Ubi Soft released *Chessmaster 8000* (reviewed in TC! February 2002), but a new version of the popular chess game and mentoring program is out.

People familiar with the *Chessmaster* series won't see much difference in the way the game looks. The menu interface and the game itself look pretty much the same as they have in the last few versions. In *Chessmaster 8000*, Ubi Soft completely re-vamped the chess-playing game engine to improve gameplay and the artificial intelligence of the computer players. It worked. The developers have worked to improve the engine again, but like we said in our review of *Chessmaster 8000*, you'd have to be a top chess player to notice the difference.

The game has played well for years.

Chessmaster 9000 offers chess players some new features, including an extension to the library of chess games. The notation to more than 800 classic chess games (including the fictional game played by HAL and Frank Poole in the movie *2001: A Space Oddysey* and the

Chessmaster 9000



A great feature, the Blunder Alert, will inform players if they are about to make a bad move.

real games between the computer Deep Blue and Garry Kasparov) is here for players to view and learn from. Games played during 2001 and 2002 by some of the world's chess Grand Masters have been added to the library for this version of the game.

Over 30 new chess sets are available to

play on, and there are more than 150 computer AI opponents to play against. Players can go up against opponents from sheer beginner-level, who haven't yet grasped the concept of making a strategy, to Grand Master level, so the game can scale to almost any player's level of ability.

One new feature will attract chess novices who want to improve their games. The Blunder Alert feature, which can be turned on or off, will inform players when they're about to make a bad move. An icon appears that players can click on, and *Chessmaster* will tell them why it thinks

they're making a big mistake. Players can choose to make a different move (hopefully a better one) or can ignore the helpful warning (possibly at their own misfortune).

In the tutorial area, there's a new class about the psychology of competition by International Master Josh Waitzkin, who

is responsible for most of the tutorials and classes in *Chessmaster 9000* (and 8000 before it). There's also a new endgame quiz by five-time US Chess Champion Larry Evans, which lets chess players test their endgame skills.

Overall, *Chessmaster 9000* is an excellent chess game and mentoring program for most skill levels, but it's of most interest to those who aren't winning world championships (as Deep Blue proved, the best chess players can and will beat computer chess programs). Players that already own one of the last two or three versions of *Chessmaster* might not feel it's necessary to buy *Chessmaster 9000* unless they want the new classes and additions to the chess library. *

more info

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PC Gaming: What's coming ...

By CHRIS TALBOT

PC gamers will be getting a few treats this year, if all works out as planned. Ubi Soft, one of the biggest PC game publishers in the world, will be reinventing one of its classic titles in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) and launching a new chapter in the life of one of its most popular virtual superstars.

Myst heading online



In January, Ubi Soft began its closed beta testing of a new MMORPG. So what, you may ask? It seems every other month there's a new MMORPG trying to get its feet firmly planted on the virtual ground. This time, however, Ubi Soft will be taking its classic RPG/puzzle game *Myst* online as a persistent world.

Most PC game players (and even console players, for that matter) should be familiar with *Myst* and its sequel, *Riven*. Until Electronic Arts' *The Sims* came along, *Myst* was the best-selling PC game of all time. It was also a family-friendly game, as there was no combat involved and not aimed at so-called "twitchy" gamers. Playing the fantasy game and doing well was about using your head to solve puzzle after mind-boggling puzzle to find your way around the world and solve its many mysteries. *Myst* was also years ahead of most games of its time in terms of graphics.

Fans of the series might now be sitting on the edges of their chairs for the upcoming *Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst*. Now in closed beta testing, *Uru* will be an online-only game set in the persistent world of the *Myst* games. Players will be able to explore fully fleshed out environments, participate in an ever-changing storyline and meet other players in a massively multiplayer experience. This will truly take the *Myst* series in a bold, new direction.

However, gamers will have to wait until later this year for the game to hit

shelves. Those interested in applying to be a beta tester can check out the official Web site at uru.ubi.com.

Hoodlums looking for Rayman

Speaking of Ubi Soft, the company will soon be releasing *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* for PC, as well as Xbox, Game Boy Advance, GameCube and PlayStation 2.

In this newest title in the series, a fanatical army of armed and dangerous hoodlums are after Rayman, and the hero's only chance of survival is to do battle with the hoodlums and try to separate the Dark Lord Lum from Globox (who has swallowed Lum).

Ubi Soft has released a number of sneak preview videos and screenshots. The game looks to be amusing and fun, but we'll withhold judgment until we've seen a finished product. Expect to see some *Rayman* goodness in stores this month.

Strategize with *Galactic Civilizations*

The story behind Strategy First's upcoming space strategy game, *Galactic Civilizations*, is as such: It's 2178 and the hyper-drive has greatly improved interstellar travel. The galaxy is evolving quickly, and the hyper-drive was expected to help forge closer bonds between sentient beings throughout the galaxy. Instead, the opposite has happened and communication is all but dead.

Galactic civilizations are fighting each other to colonize worlds and to be the supreme rulers of the galaxy. Players will take on the roles of one of these civilizations and strategize to take over as much of the galaxy as possible. Of course, military might isn't the only way to win. Economics and politics will also be crucial.

According to Strategy First and developer Stardock, the artificial intelligence in the game will be so complex that playing politics in *Galactic Civilizations* should be as complicated and challenging as engaging in real world politics. The complexity doesn't end there, though. Players can save games to Stardock.net, allowing the game AI to take a gander at top players' strategies and adjust to it. Translation: The AI can get smarter as time goes on. That's a

frightening thought for some and a dream come true for others.

Expect to see *Galactic Civilizations* on store shelves on March 25.

EverQuest just keeps getting bigger



Distributing MMORPG expansion packs online only makes sense, but to date, there have been no *EverQuest* expansions sold as downloads ... until now, that is. *The Legacy of Ykesha*, the fifth *EverQuest* expansion, was expected to go live around Feb. 24.

The expansion will add a new playable race – the Frogloks of Guk, a race of (you guessed it) bipedal frogs. Strong swimmers able to hold their breaths for long periods of time, the Frogloks are a good-aligned species that will have both the shaman and cleric occupations open to them.

New creatures, a cartography system and expanded bank capacity are just some of the features that *EQ* players will find in *The Legacy of Ykesha*. Sony Online Entertainment is selling it as a downloadable expansion, but a limited number of CD-ROMs should find their way to store shelves.

EverQuest seems to be invading all manner of electronic gadgets these days. While the PC version of the game has been operational since 1998, gamers can also purchase a Macintosh OS X version of the game, as well as versions on PocketPC and BREW-enabled mobile phones.

The *EQ* world will get a shake up later this year with the launch of *EverQuest II*, which is expected to be available during the fourth quarter of 2003 (of course, the system specs required to play *EQ II* will be somewhat higher than those required for the original *EQ*). ◆

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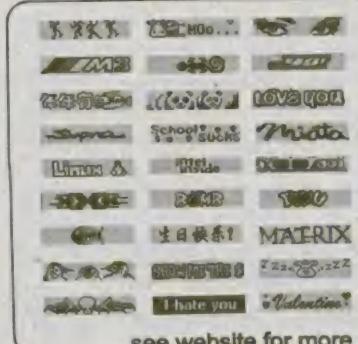
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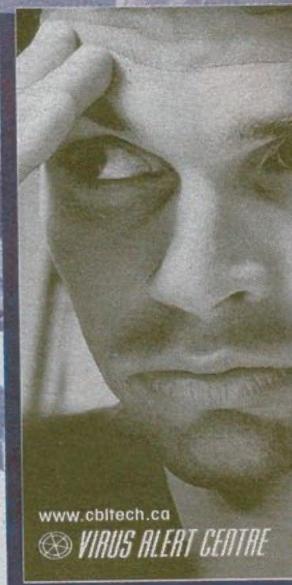
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Profile: Jemeni Gairy



Though just two years old, urban radio station Flow 93.5 FM has enjoyed a quick ride to success. That's not hard to do when you've attached your sails to the most popular music on the charts – hip hop. But as the saying goes, a team is only as strong as its individual members. A key part of that team is Jemeni (a.k.a. Jemeni Gairy), the 20-something morning host of the fledgling station's Morning Rush show. Gairy wasn't parachuted in either. She cut her teeth in community radio, spending six years on CKLN 88.1's long-running Power Move Show and Droppin' Dimez, the female-centric hip hop and reggae show. Gairy says making the transition wasn't easy. "I was nervous because there's so many more people listening, there's so much more pressure on you," she recalls. "At CKLN you're supposed to mess up – that's how you learn. Here you just gotta hit the ground running." Despite criticisms early on from some who were dismayed by Flow's commercial direction, Gairy is proud

of the station's accomplishments and is especially thrilled to be a role model for black youth. "For me, the most flattering part is the young people, especially the young women. And now all these young people are like, 'I can be a broadcaster, I can be a music director.'"

Who: Jemeni Gairy, morning show host, Morning Rush, Flow 93.5 FM.

Computer now used: P3 Dell PC, 256 MB RAM, 30 GB HDD.

Computer first used: Apple II.

Favourite computer: iMac w/flat panel; "That's so hot!"

Other technical gadgetry in use at this time (cells, PDA, etc.): Bell Audiovox cell.

Do you use your computer for play: Find song lists, play music and solitaire.

Best thing about the technology

you have: "It means I can always be in touch with people. It means I can procrastinate and do my work at home in my pajamas."

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Personal take on issues dealing with technology: "I think technology is totally necessary. A lot of people get frightened by it, though. People have to be comfortable enough to make the technology fit them instead of trying to change themselves in order to fit in with what's going on."

– Samson Okalow

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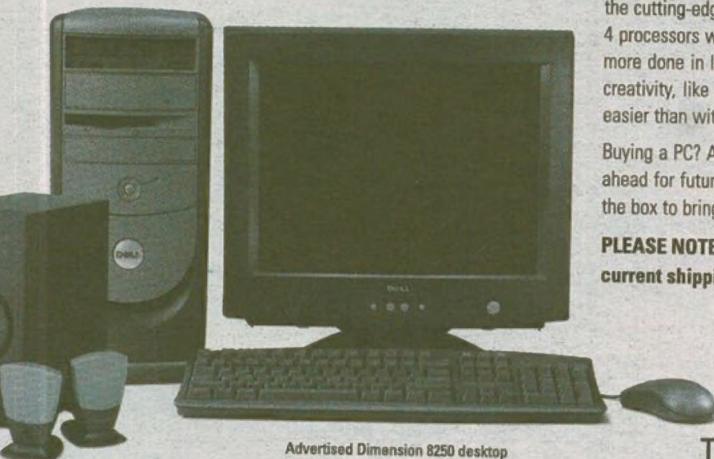


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